

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20



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David Jones
OBE DL

This has been a difficult and remarkable year in so many ways.

If anyone had predicted in September 2019 that schools would be closed for much of the academic year and exams cancelled, I doubt whether anyone would believe them. Yet here we are, months into a global pandemic that has seen our whole world turned upside down.

There's no doubt that the decision to close schools and cancel exams was the right one. When the number of cases of COVID-19 was growing across the UK at an alarming rate, decisive action had to be taken to try and stem the rising tide of infections. That immediately led to many questions from teachers, learners and their parents on what would replace the exams and how would qualifications be awarded. We conducted a public consultation, reaching around 4,000 learners, parents and teachers across Wales to ensure that we delivered the fairest solution possible.

We set to work to answer these questions, knowing there would be no easy or perfect answers. This was a situation that none of us had ever faced before, as we were forced to confront the reality of awarding qualifications without examinations.

As the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales, our role is to make sure that qualifications meet learners' needs, and to promote confidence in the qualifications system. In a year when we faced unprecedented challenges, the needs of learners remained at the heart of our work. During a global crisis, our primary concern was to do the right thing for learners in Wales, responding to changing needs and circumstances. We wanted to make sure that qualifications continued to be trusted and valued, and that learners would be rewarded for their efforts.

Working in difficult circumstances, we focused on finding what we considered to be the right solution. We didn't work in isolation, because we recognised that so many people had very strong opinions about what should happen. As the situation progressed, we felt strongly that having broadly similar results to previous years was important, so that the results could be considered credible and protect the interests of learners in the longer term. It was not about protecting the system at the cost of learners; it was intended to be the very opposite.

As we all know, the standardisation models that were proposed to determine the results, which were designed by WJEC and approved by Qualifications Wales, were replaced with centre assessment grades. I fully understand that a standardisation approach could never have replaced the fulfilment learners would have felt had they completed their exams. The fact is that any alternative to actually sitting an exam would be imperfect and contentious.

As Chair of the Board of Qualifications Wales, my role is to lead the team to ensure all our work was focused on balancing all the factors during this difficult time to try and ensure that learners received the fairest grade possible. Wherever we could, we've tried to take the needs of learners into account in every one of our recommendations.

Finally, I think it's fitting that I pay tribute to the hard work and professionalism shown by everyone in the education sector – as well as our own employees at Qualifications Wales.

FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Philip Blaker

It's clear that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will cast its shadow for learners, parents, teachers and the entire education sector well into 2021. It's therefore only right that this annual report looks in detail at the impact the pandemic has had on qualifications in summer 2020, and how we have responded to the challenges.

Beyond dealing with the impact of the health crisis, we have continued to progress our work to improve the general and vocational qualifications offer for learners in Wales.

We have worked hard to prepare the way for qualifications to reflect the changes being made to the curriculum in Wales. We launched the first of a series of consultations, *Qualified for the future*, asking for views on how we should determine what changes are needed to exams and qualifications when the new Curriculum for Wales is introduced.

The findings of this first consultation helped set the direction for qualifications taken at the age of 16. Most respondents agreed we should keep the GCSE name; it is a strong brand that is well understood by both employers and the wider public. They also agreed that the content and assessment of GCSEs will need to change to meet the needs of future learners.

We know that the pandemic has raised questions about how qualifications should be assessed in the future. Our planned approach means we will work closely with a wide range of stakeholders to help answer those questions. We have set out our approach and timeline for progressing this work over the next few years; our next consultation, which will consider the future range of GCSE subjects, is due to start in January 2021.

This year, building on the findings of earlier reviews, we have developed proposals for a new Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate. These proposals build on the strong foundations of the current qualification, including its success in helping learners to access higher education. We will be consulting on our proposals in the autumn.

We have also been busy reviewing the vocational qualifications available in several different employment sectors. We have now introduced all of the new qualifications in the health and social care sector and are working towards September 2021, when the first of a new suite of qualifications in the construction and the built environment sector will be taught for the first time.

We're developing approval criteria for a new AS/A Level Digital Technology qualification, which will be available for first teaching in September 2022, and have compiled a report on the engineering, advanced manufacturing and energy sector in Wales. That report will be published in the autumn of 2020.

COVID-19 has made 2020 a difficult year for many. It seems unlikely that 2021 will be easier, but we remain committed to seeking the best solutions to protect learners' interests and promote confidence in the qualifications system.

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC 2020

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a major impact on all our lives, including everyone involved in education, and most importantly, the learners.

Our decisions throughout this period should be viewed in the context of the constantly changing situation. In March, the pandemic was surging through the UK and the rest of Europe, and there was a great deal of uncertainty about any future arrangements. On 18 March, the Minister for Education took the decision to close schools and cancel exams as a result of the pandemic.

Building on our initial work with awarding bodies and our fellow UK qualifications regulators, we developed several options for consideration by the Minister for a situation none of us had ever faced before. Establishing new arrangements for the summer was essential to make sure that learners received grades, and to enable them to move on to the next stage of their lives, whether that was further study, training or employment.

Ensuring fair grades for learners

Our primary concern was to ensure that learners studying all regulated general and vocational qualifications, and who were due to sit exams, would be awarded a fair set of grades to recognise their work and support their progression.

Under normal circumstances, our clear preference would have been for exams to go ahead as planned, so that the worries and concerns of learners and centres could be avoided. In the face of a global pandemic, however, it quickly became apparent that this would not be possible.

Consulting with learners in 2020

We consulted on a set of aims that we proposed to underpin the awarding of grades in the summer 2020 exam series for all learners – whether they were studying GCSEs, AS, A levels and the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC), or vocational qualifications. Our consultation also addressed the need to implement a specific appeals process.

We recognised that this would be a difficult time for all involved, and that there would be a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty. We communicated with learners and stakeholders as solutions were developed, and provided regular updates through a range of communication channels.

Increased communications activity

A dedicated ‘Coronavirus’ area was created on our website to provide the most up-to-date information. The section included statements from us and partner organisations, including Welsh Government and WJEC, and a ‘Help and Advice’ page providing links to other resources.

We published a series of blog posts, written both by our senior staff and external contributors, including headteachers and learners. We created infographics and videos to explain the awarding process and published answers to Frequently Asked Questions on a regular basis.

We worked closely with schools, work-based learning providers, further education (FE) and higher education (HE) establishments, as well as other regulators across the UK, Welsh Government, WJEC and UCAS to share key information and resources to support learner progression and improve public understanding.

► WORKING WITH CENTRES

In May, we published an information pack for centres on the submission of centre assessment data. This set out guidance for schools and colleges on how to collect and submit data to WJEC.

Responses to our consultation subsequently highlighted concerns about potential bias (conscious or unconscious) on the part of schools and colleges. As a result, we updated our guidance, reminding schools and colleges of their public sector equalities duty, and the need to maintain a record of how judgements were made.

We engaged with a range of representative groups, as well as WJEC, to help develop this guidance quickly and effectively, and we included a message to learners in our information pack.

On 6 April 2020, the Education Minister issued us with a Direction under Section 53 of the Qualifications Wales Act 2015 to have regard to Welsh Government policy regarding the cancellation of exams and the subsequent determination of grades. The Direction required us to ensure that a fair and robust approach to issuing grades to the summer 2020 cohort of learners was adopted.

► CONSULTATION

Between Tuesday 28 April and Wednesday 13 May 2020, we consulted on proposals relating to the arrangements for summer 2020, which were:

- the aims which would underpin the statistical standardisation model for the issuing of grades for learners in summer 2020; and
- the appeals process for summer 2020

[Centres are organisations or establishments \(for example, schools, colleges, training providers or employers\) that deliver assessments and other activities to learners on behalf of awarding bodies.](#)



We were clear in our consultation that there would be no perfect solution, and we were conscious that these proposals would be less desirable than the normal arrangements. We remained open to considering alternatives and encouraged respondents to offer suggestions.

As well as the [full consultation document](#), we provided access to a version that was tailored to specifically encourage young people to respond. We received 4,057 responses in total; more than half (51.3%) of these were from people who described themselves as ‘learners’.

Learner	Education professional	Parent/ carer	All others	Sum	Total respondents	Difference
2,079	803	1,128	117	4,127	4,049	78
51.3%	19.8%	27.9%	2.9%	101.9%*	100.0%	1.9%

**The total adds up to more than 100% because some respondents identified themselves as belonging to more than one category, e.g. teacher and parent.)*

We engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including those representing young people and minority groups. The consultation process included consulting on the Integrated Impact Assessment. This asked for views on the impact of our proposals, including on groups with protected characteristics, and on the Welsh language.

Following the consultation, we published our [decisions](#) alongside a summary and analysis of the responses.

In relation to Proposal 1, the agreed aims that underpinned the statistical standardisation model for the issuing of grades for learners were:

- learners for whom a qualification-level centre assessment grade and rank order were submitted would receive a grade;
- national outcomes would be broadly similar to those in previous years, to reduce the risk of unfairness for learners over time and maintain public confidence;
- as far as possible, the process for awarding grades would not systematically advantage or disadvantage learners, including those with characteristics protected by equalities legislation;
- the statistical standardisation model would use a range of evidence to calculate the likely grades that learners would have achieved, had they been able to complete their assessments.

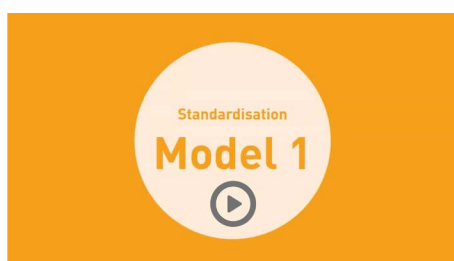
We also explained our decisions in relation to Proposal 2, about an appeals process for the summer 2020 exam series, and created an infographic setting out answers to the key questions about this process. We encouraged learners or others who had concerns about bias, discrimination or any other factor that suggested that a centre did not behave with care or integrity when determining the centre assessment grade and/or rank order information, to raise these concerns with their centre. We expected such allegations to be rare, but this was an important safeguard for learners and their overall confidence in this year’s grading arrangements. WJEC subsequently published more information and detail about the appeals process.

On 30 June, we held a public webinar to outline the findings and decisions of the consultation. This was open to all stakeholders, including learners, parents and carers. More than 300 people attended the webinar, submitting written questions to us beforehand. A summary of those questions and responses was made available on our website, along with a [recording of the webinar](#).

► AGREED APPROACH

The centre assessment data submitted to WJEC was subject to a standardisation process developed by WJEC. The process used two statistical models developed by WJEC that we had approved, to ensure that a common standard was applied to grading learners. We used infographics and videos to explain how these models would work.

► MODEL 1 - USED FOR A LEVEL AND SOME UNITISED GCSES

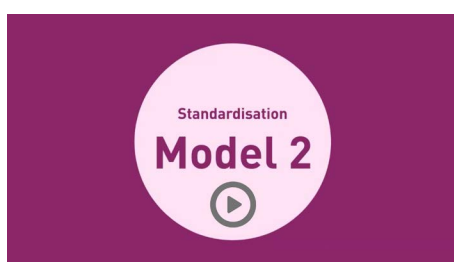


The first step for standardisation in [Model 1](#) was around allocating a set of grades to the school based on the prior attainment of those learners in that school or college and their prior attainment in those subjects and qualifications being taken.

For A levels, that model looked at AS performance for that cohort and then defined a set of grades based on a projection of where they would end up at A level.

The second step was to allocate grades based on the rank order provided by the school. This model was developed for Wales only.

► MODEL 2 - USED FOR AS LEVEL AND MOST GCSES



The first step for standardisation in [Model 2](#) looked at the historical performance of the centre in that subject over a two- to three-year period, to calculate an average for the performance of that school. That average was then adjusted according to the ability of the cohort. For AS levels, the prior attainment data used was that relating the average performance of learners at GCSE. For GCSEs, the prior attainment data used was based on learners' average

performance across year 9 national tests and Key Stage 3 teacher assessments. This model was similar to the one adopted in England, but with additional prior attainment information used for GCSEs.

Step two was to allocate grades based on the rank order provided by the school.

► VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

In parallel with our work on GCSEs, AS and A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate, it was essential for us to find solutions for learners taking vocational qualifications.

To make sure that there was a common approach to the vocational and technical qualifications offered across the UK, we worked closely with Ofqual to ensure fairness for all learners and to keep them fully updated on developments. In April, Qualifications Wales and Ofqual published the principles that would be applied to different groups of vocational qualifications, linked to their purpose and how those qualifications are used by learners for progression. The arrangements that we announced jointly with Ofqual applied to many of the other vocational qualifications taken in schools, colleges, and work-based learning providers in Wales, including BTECs and other key progression qualifications. We applied the same principles when making decisions on vocational qualifications designed specifically to meet the needs of learners in Wales.

Wherever possible, we made sure that learners due to complete their qualifications in the summer would get a result. For example, we announced that Essential Skills Wales learners due to complete their qualification before the end of July would receive a calculated result.

Many vocational qualifications required a balance between the desire to issue results in summer 2020 and the need to make sure learners had demonstrated the professional competence necessary to work in a particular sector. This can be demonstrated by our work on agreeing the way forward for Health and Social Care and Childcare qualifications. Given the complexity and diversity of the vocational qualifications landscape, it was not possible to implement a one-size-fits-all approach. Therefore, a less prescriptive regulatory approach was proposed, centered on a flexible, principles-based extraordinary framework, which delegated to awarding bodies the decision-making around how they delivered results to learners. We monitored the arrangements being put in place to ensure they were appropriate.

Centres had a key role in making sure that any new arrangements worked effectively and that results, or alternative assessment arrangements, could be provided to learners.



► RESULTS

Scotland published its National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications on 4 August 2020. The results showed that 125,000 results had not received the centre assessment grade (CAG) provided by their centre. Following a public outcry, the Scottish Education Minister directed that grades should be solely based on teacher assessments. Although Scotland used a different standardisation system from that adopted in Wales, public opinion here – and elsewhere in the UK – shifted away from standardisation models and towards the CAGs provided by schools and colleges.

On 12 August, the Minister for Education issued Qualifications Wales with a Direction requiring us to pay due regard to Welsh Government’s new policy that A level learners should not receive a grade in a subject in summer 2020 that was lower than their corresponding AS level grade. This rule was introduced after the initial release of results by WJEC to schools and colleges. Learners who received their A level grades on the following day (13 August) were advised to check if the grade awarded to see if it was the same, higher or lower than their AS level grade in that subject. If the grade was the same or higher, then no action was required. However, if the grade was lower, it would be replaced with the same grade as that received for the AS level and the revised grades would be issued by WJEC as soon as possible.

The [Minister’s Direction](#) also asked us to consider whether the grounds for appeal should be broadened for all A level, AS level and GCSE qualifications. This reflected significant changes to the appeals process announced (and subsequently withdrawn) in England.

Following changes in other jurisdictions, the Minister announced on 17 August that learners in Wales would be awarded their CAGs. In response, we instructed WJEC to issue learners with their CAGs for GCSEs, AS and A levels and the Welsh Baccaulaureate Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications. Any learner who had been issued with an AS, A level or Advanced Welsh Baccaulaureate Skills Challenge Certificate grade higher than their CAG received the higher grade.

Results for
A level, AS, GCSE and
the Skills Challenge
Certificate in Wales –
Summer 2020

Overview



August 2020

We provided a comprehensive analysis of this summer’s GCSE, AS and A level results on the relevant results days (13 August for AS and A levels, and 20 August for GCSEs). On 4 September, we published a [revised analysis of outcomes](#), which included the final grades awarded alongside the CAGs and the grades that learners would have received if the standardisation had applied.



While we were putting arrangements in place for summer 2020, we began looking ahead to awarding in 2021. In May, we shared our initial thinking about the possible approaches through blog posts on our website.

As the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on teaching and learning became clearer, we developed more specific proposals about the type and extent of adjustments that may be required. We considered possible adjustments with WJEC for the summer 2021 series, and suggested that those be discussed and agreed with stakeholders to provide an indication of what is required in the next academic year.

In July, we published a statement in response to Ofqual’s position paper regarding Vocational and Technical Qualifications and Assessments 2020-21. We also issued two letters to centres, and have kept in regular contact with them, providing updates on summer 2021 planning.

As we move forward, we are considering all options available for summer 2021, and will involve stakeholders throughout the process to make sure that we find the best solution for learners in Wales.

SECTOR REVIEWS

► ENGINEERING, ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND ENERGY

In autumn 2020, we plan to publish the findings of our fourth sector review – of qualifications and the qualifications system in the engineering, advanced manufacturing and energy sector.

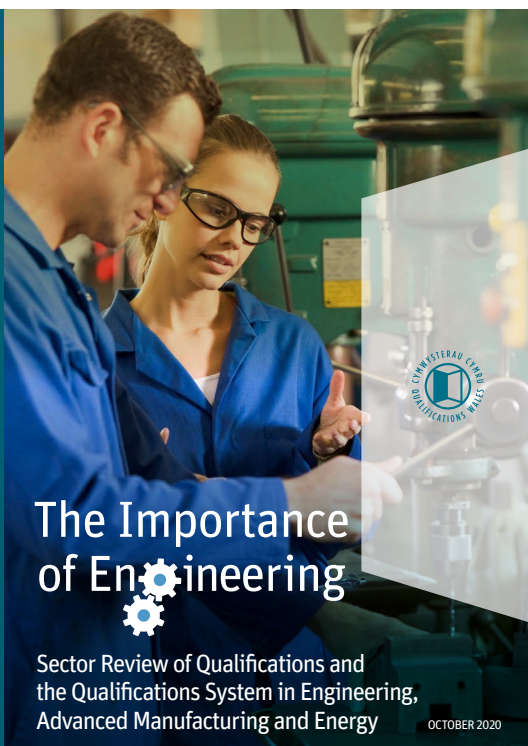
The sector plays an important role in the economy of Wales, employing 223,000 people across more than 5,000 companies of varying sizes. The sector has been identified as a priority industry by the Welsh Government. The review was extensive, and included detailed interviews with 104 stakeholders, including more than 55 employers across Wales.

We also:

- commissioned focused discussion groups, with over 350 students taking relevant qualifications across Wales;
- convened a stakeholder reference panel with representatives from employers, learning providers and other interested bodies to provide us with advice and to test our lines of enquiry;
- contracted subject and assessment experts to review a sample of qualifications from across the sector, together with examples of students' assessed work;
- commissioned a comparative evaluation of international qualifications systems, to identify good practice that could be adopted in Wales.

The review identified numerous strengths of the qualifications system within the sector. These included the strong relationship between learning providers and employers, and the value and importance placed on qualifications and apprenticeships in the sector. It also noted the view of most learning providers that they are satisfied with the range of qualifications available in the sector. However, we identified issues that need addressing, which mainly relate to the currency, relevance and/or appropriateness of specific qualifications.

As part of the review, we developed an action plan to address – as far as reasonably possible – the issues that we have identified. We tested these actions extensively with employers, learning providers, sector experts, awarding bodies and with our stakeholder reference panel. Over the next year, we will engage closely with awarding bodies to oversee the implementation of this action plan.



The Importance of Engineering

Sector Review of Qualifications and the Qualifications System in Engineering, Advanced Manufacturing and Energy

OCTOBER 2020

The report and supporting resources will be published on our website in October 2020.



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CONTENTS

► HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE, INCLUDING CHILDCARE

Health and social care, including childcare, is one of the most important employment sectors in the country, as events in 2020 have shown. The coronavirus pandemic has brought into sharp focus how much everyone depends on the experience and expertise of our health professionals and carers.

This was the first sector we reviewed when Qualifications Wales came into being in 2015, and we published our sector review in July 2016. We then commissioned the awarding body consortium of City and Guilds and WJEC to develop new qualifications for Wales and in September 2019, the first tranche of qualifications was introduced. We have now approved the second tranche of qualifications for delivery from September 2020. The suite includes new qualifications at level 4, designed to support and recognise the knowledge, skills and understanding of the health and social care workforce in areas such as advocacy, shared lives and childcare.

Introducing of this new suite of bilingual qualifications will benefit both learners and employers by:

- enabling a consistent approach to assessment and content coverage;
- providing clear routes for learners to progress into FE, HE and employment;
- giving centres the ability to share knowledge and best practice; and
- providing a clear suite of qualifications to support the NHS and care workforce regulators.

We launched the new qualifications at Bridgend College in September 2019, at an event attended by representatives from colleges, work-based learning providers, employers and students. Throughout the project, we have worked closely with our colleagues at Social Care Wales, Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) and our consortium partners. During the reporting year, we engaged with Colegau Cymru's HSC network. We also worked with higher education establishments to help increase awareness of the new level 3 qualifications and with curriculum leaders in further education institutions to understand the impact of the new qualifications on those organisations.



► CONSTRUCTION AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

During the reporting year, we have continued to engage actively with stakeholders involved in the construction and built environment sector, as we move towards introducing new qualifications for first teaching in September 2021.

Our reforms will see a complex market with hundreds of existing qualifications being simplified by a suite of new qualifications that will help reshape education and training for the industry in Wales. The new qualifications will offer learners better progression routes into employment. Assessment will be streamlined and robust, making sure that learners have the skills and knowledge they need to get ahead in their careers. The move follows our sector review, [Building the Future](#), published in 2018, and which looked at the current range of qualifications, involving learning providers and employers, both large and small.

We awarded contracts to a consortium of City & Guilds and EAL to work with us to design and deliver post-16 Foundation, Progression and Apprenticeship qualifications for first teaching from September 2021. The consortium has created a new website, [Skills for Wales](#), which contains all the latest information on the development of the new qualifications. During the reporting year, we have also led the work undertaken by WJEC to develop GCSE and A level in Built Environment to encourage interest in, and understanding of, the built environment for learners with a wide range of abilities.

The new qualifications are being developed in conjunction with the industry to help it meet the needs of today's construction and building services sector. They will enable workers both to understand the role of new technologies in the sector and to maintain and repair the traditional buildings and structures we have in Wales. The introduction of these qualifications has been welcomed by employers as providing learners with a broader knowledge of the industry as a whole. Sector specialists have contributed to the development of the new qualifications and will continue to support the development process. We have started to review the qualification specifications and sample assessments materials of the qualifications being developed.

Building
the future

CONSTRUCTION AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT QUALIFICATIONS ARE CHANGING



► DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Over the past 12 months, we continued to implement the actions that we committed to in our sector review of qualifications and the qualifications system in information and communications technology (ICT) – [Delivering Digital](#).

During this time, we developed requirements for new GCSE and GCE AS/A level Digital Technology qualifications. We engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to decide on the high-level content of the qualifications and how they should be assessed. We put in place a thorough and demanding approval process for the GCSE Digital Technology qualification, using subject experts and practitioners to inform our work. The GCSE, developed by WJEC, was approved and made available to centres in August 2020 to enable them to prepare to offer the qualification more than a year before its first teaching in September 2021.

For the GCE AS/A level qualification, we intend to conduct a detailed approval process in early 2021, with the aim of making the qualification available to centres in plenty of time for first teaching in September 2022.



Delivering Digital

► QUALIFIED FOR THE FUTURE

The new Curriculum for Wales, due to be introduced in 2022, is the most ambitious development in education for a generation.

In 2016, the Welsh Government commissioned Professor Graham Donaldson to consider new assessment and curriculum arrangements that would provide a more coherent basis for learning, teaching and assessment.

As the regulator, our main focus is on how qualifications for 16-year-olds will need to change to support the new curriculum that is being introduced by the Welsh Government and meet the future needs of learners.

Between November 2019 and February 2020, we consulted on the high-level principles that will underpin the future qualifications offer at 16 in Wales.

This was the first of a planned series of consultations, and sought to:

- agree the high-level principles that will be used to shape the future qualifications offer at the age of 16 in Wales;
- establish whether the GCSE name should be retained in Wales as a central part of the qualifications offer; and
- determine whether there should be a standalone qualification that supports the development and assessment of the integral skills as defined in the new curriculum.



To attract as wide a range of views as possible, we produced easy-read and youth-friendly versions of the consultation, and ran a series of public focus groups hosted in FE colleges across Wales.

The consultation attracted more than 600 responses, with more than 200 from learners.

Overall, we identified support for:

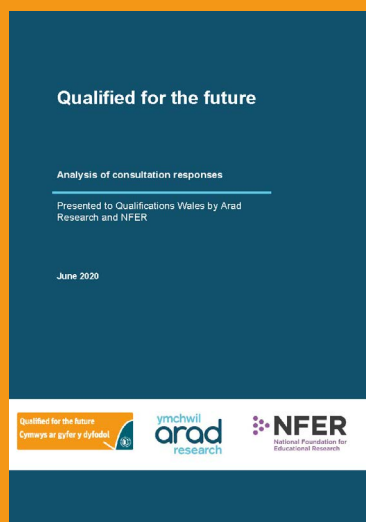
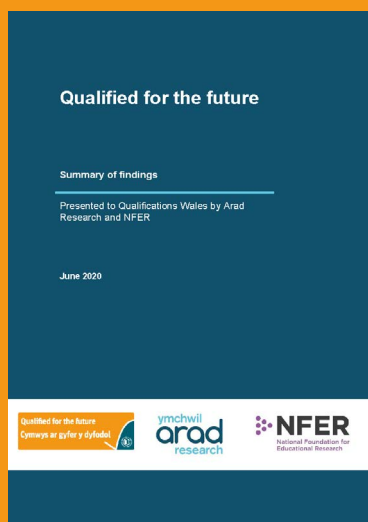
- a qualification that supports the development of integral skills as defined within the new curriculum;
- retaining the GCSE name;
- ensuring that the overall publicly funded qualifications offer at the age of 16 is both inclusive and coherent; and
- publicly funded qualifications at the age of 16 to be available in both Welsh and English and to support the new curriculum.

We **published our decisions** in June, along with a full analysis of responses and a youth-friendly report on the findings of the consultation. Our decisions gave clarity to schools and learners on the future direction of travel in relation to qualifications for the new curriculum. They also clearly signaled our approach and timeline for progressing this work in the next few years.

A second consultation is planned for January 2021. The objective of the second consultation is to establish the future range of qualifications that should form the publicly funded qualifications offer at the age of 16 in Wales.

We will again promote this second consultation extensively to gather as many views as possible to make sure that the qualifications for the new curriculum will be fit for future learners.

Qualified for the future



► THE WELSH BACCALAUREATE AND SKILLS CHALLENGE CERTIFICATE

Following an independent review of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) that we commissioned in 2018, we [published a report](#) that summarised the strengths of the qualification as well as identifying areas for improvement. The report also explored ways of increasing awareness and understanding of both the Skills Challenge Certificate and the Welsh Baccalaureate as a whole.

In 2019, the Senedd Children Young People and Education Committee launched its own enquiry into the Welsh Baccalaureate. The recommendations in the Committee's report, [Bacc to the Future](#), complemented the work we had begun in that area.

National/Foundation

Our reform work began by focusing on the National/Foundation SCC, which is primarily delivered at Key Stage 4. Working with stakeholders, we confirmed that the qualifications' strength lay in the skills that they developed and assessed, which aligned with the integral skills of the new Curriculum for Wales.

As part of our *Qualified for the future* consultation, we asked whether a standalone skills-based qualification should be provided for 14 to 16-year-old learners. Responses to the consultation showed that there was support for this.

We have since worked closely with colleagues who are part of the *Qualified for the future* project to ensure that as we develop proposals for a new National/Foundation SCC, it complements the overall qualification offer for 14 to 16-year-olds. We have also continued to explore proposals in relation to the 14 to 16 offer that address the issues previously raised through stakeholder engagement and reviews.

Post-16

In 2019, we agreed with Welsh Government and WJEC that the Foundation (Post-16) and National (Post-16) Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications – which were primarily designed

What  the
Welsh Baccalaureate?

for learners in further education colleges – and the related Welsh Bacc frameworks would not continue beyond 31 August 2020.

We felt that reducing the number of SCC qualifications from four to two would help make the overall Welsh Bacc simpler to understand and easier to explain. At the same time, we believed that it would allow us to focus our efforts on strengthening the design of the Advanced and National/Foundation Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications.

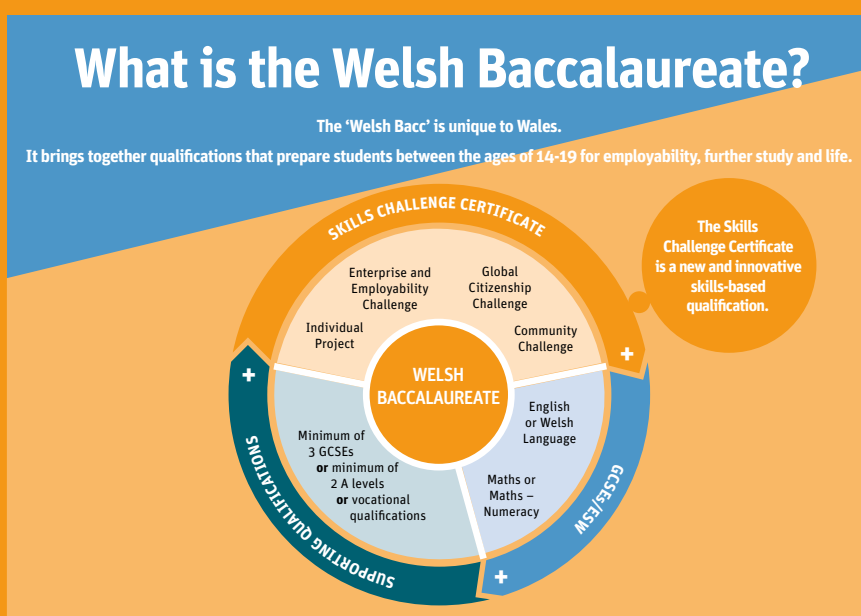
In autumn 2019, we took the necessary steps to discontinue the post-16 provision. This means that the learners who started on their courses for these qualifications in September 2019 will be the last cohort to take these two qualifications. We wrote to key stakeholders to notify them of this decision.

Advanced

This year, we have continued to work in collaboration with practitioners and other stakeholders to further test our thinking, and to shape our proposals for changes to the Advanced SCC qualification, ready for public consultation. Our work with stakeholders has been extremely valuable, in terms of developing our proposals and demonstrating the strength of support for them. For example, our intention for the qualification to be seen as a continuation of, and progression from, the new Curriculum for Wales has been acknowledged by key stakeholders.

The proposed new Advanced level qualification builds on the strengths of the existing qualification whilst being more manageable. This helps to meet the needs of learners, and addresses concerns over health and well-being, whilst the qualification's simpler design will facilitate communication and awareness-raising.

We will consult on our proposals publicly in September 2020, with the aim of publishing our findings in spring 2021. The qualification will then need to be developed by an awarding body ready for first teaching in September 2023. This will allow approximately one year from the time the qualification and resources are available to first teaching, for centres to prepare and receive any training required.



► CONFIDENCE IN QUALIFICATIONS AND THE QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM IN WALES

In line with our second principal aim, we have continued to research confidence in qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales. In October 2019, we published a [report exploring stakeholders' views](#) and in July 2020, we published the [findings of our annual survey of the general public in Wales](#).

Over the last three years, stakeholder views have remained broadly similar, and there has been a positive trend in levels of confidence amongst the public. We are considering the findings of these reports in our work, particularly as we consider reforms to support the new curriculum.

► QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Qualifications

In general, those stakeholders who took part told us the following.

- They strongly supported GCSE and A level qualifications in Wales, and felt that these qualifications are a reliable indicator of a learner's knowledge and skills.
- They supported the additional rigour of the reformed GCSEs, but had some concerns about the level of challenge for less-able learners and the availability of Welsh-medium resources.
- They continued to support decisions to retain the A*-G grading in GCSEs and the modular approach in A levels (these qualifications were well regarded by universities both in, and outside of, Wales).
- They valued the skills learners develop in the Skills Challenge Certificate and felt that teaching and learning had improved in recent years. Whilst some stakeholders reported that the SCC helps learners when applying for higher education and is valued by universities, others felt that it has limited value in this regard.
- They valued the sector review process in vocational qualifications, but felt that the pace of progress could increase.

- They supported Welsh apprenticeship frameworks, but felt that more needed to be done to raise awareness of the merits of apprenticeships.

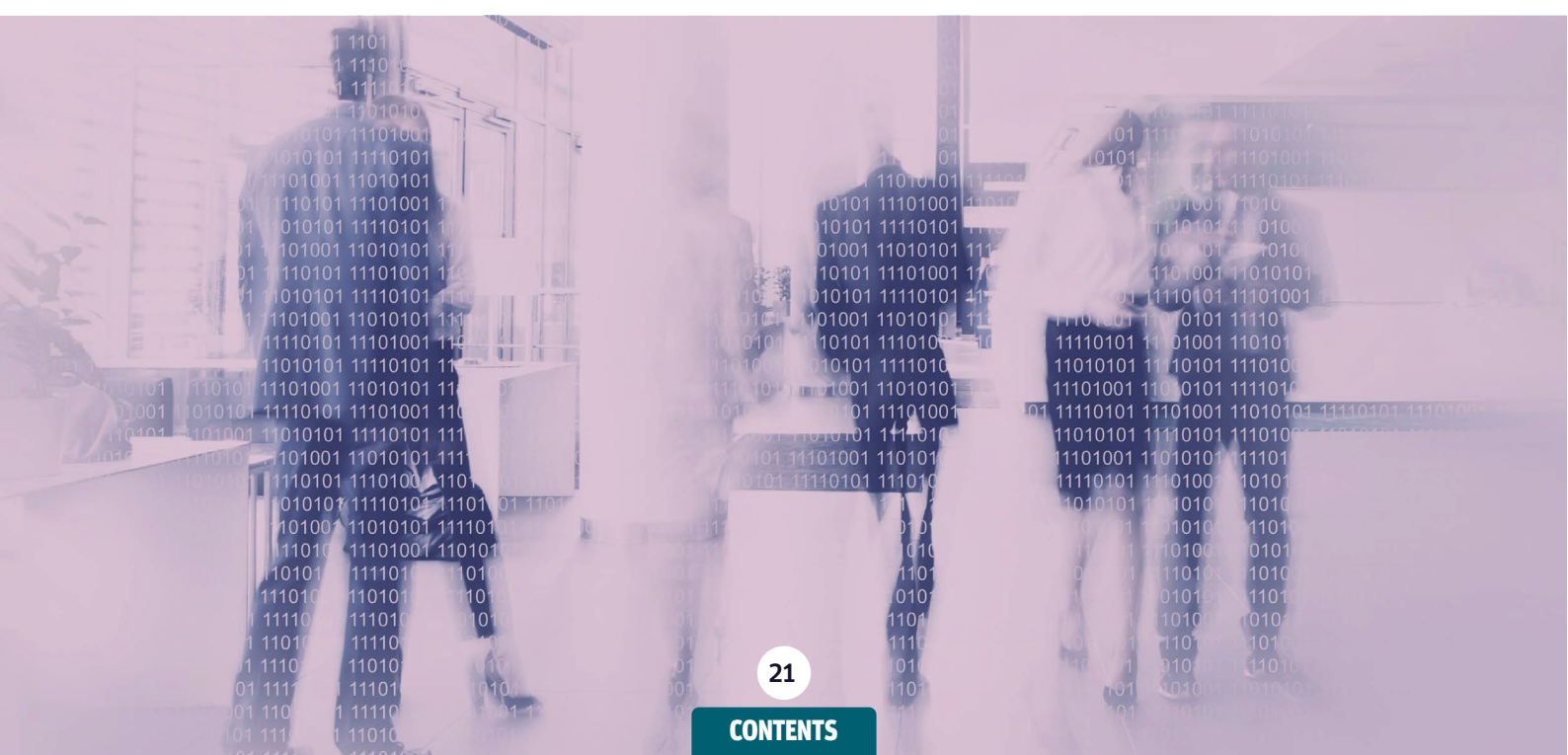
The qualifications system in Wales

- Stakeholders regarded Qualifications Wales as a strong organisation that provides leadership and clarity in the education sector. They felt we have developed good relations with the school sector, employer representatives and awarding bodies; they valued our commitment to open and transparent consultation, decision-making and regulation.
- Qualifications that are designed for Wales were valued, but stakeholders remained concerned about having a single awarding body for most GCSE and A level qualifications.
- Stakeholders were sometimes confused about the roles and responsibilities across Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and WJEC.
- They had some concerns about how the education system would manage future reforms linked to the development of the new school curriculum.

Survey of the general public

- As previously, around 80% of respondents trusted GCSEs, AS and A levels and felt that they are good preparation for further study. Opinion was mixed as to whether these qualifications are good preparation for employment.
- Awareness of the Welsh Baccalaureate remained reasonably high, with around 60% of respondents reporting that they had heard of it. However, familiarity remained relatively low, with fewer than 20% reporting that they knew much about it.
- Nearly all respondents again reported that vocational qualifications taken in school are valuable for a young person's future.

We recognise that the awarding of grades in summer 2020, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, is likely to have impacted on public confidence in qualifications and the qualifications system. In turn, this may influence how the public will view awarding of grades in 2021. We are adapting our public confidence research to help us to understand public perceptions on this subject, and we expect this to be reflected in research findings in the 2021 annual report.



► USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ASSESSMENT

In April 2020, we published two reports exploring the use of technology in assessment. The first of these was a literature review exploring the changing expectations of the [use of technology in assessment](#). The review found that although there is limited use of technology in high-stakes assessments, it is used more widely in formative assessment. It concluded that technologies offer a range of opportunities for education and assessment, some of which are yet to be realised. Along with these opportunities comes a requirement to rethink how assessment works. The review cautioned that there are barriers to effective implementation, which need to be carefully explored. The second report contained a series of case studies highlighting good or innovative [use of technology in the assessment of vocational qualifications](#). We will use the information in these reports as we continue to consider how we can make the most effective use of digital technology in qualifications.

► SUPPORTING THE NEW CURRICULUM FOR WALES

Over the past 12 months, we have also undertaken a range of research projects to inform our thinking about how qualifications taken at the age of 16 need to change to support the new curriculum.

We have:

- engaged with teachers, learners and moderators to explore their perceptions and experiences of non-examination assessment in GCSEs;
- spoken to teachers about their perceptions of the reformed GCSEs; and
- surveyed maths teachers to understand their views on GCSEs in Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy, and Level 2 Additional Maths.

We are considering the findings of this work in the process to develop proposals for qualifications to respond to the new curriculum, and we will publish key findings in the 2021 annual report.

► STATISTICS

During the reporting year, we have continued to publish our suite of official statistics using data collected from awarding bodies about the qualifications system in Wales. This included new experimental statistics on variation in centre level results in GCSEs in English, Welsh and Mathematics. A summary of these releases can be found in the following table.

Statistical release	Description	Key statistics
Centre Variation, Phase 1 GCSEs, Summer 2019	An experimental statistics release that presents data on the variation seen in centre level results in phase 1 approved GCSEs between summer 2019 and summer 2018.	
Access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A Level in Wales: 2018 to 2019 academic year	An annual release that presents data on the number of access arrangements (recorded by JCQ) and modified papers (recorded by awarding bodies) in Wales approved for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91.3% of centres had at least one approved access arrangement compared to 93.6% in 2017-18. • There were 21,475 approved access arrangements in 2018-19, (up 2.7%). • 25% extra time remains the most common type of access arrangement. • There were 6,155 modified papers produced for the summer 2019 exam series (up 23.6%).
Entries and late entries for GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: 2018 to 2019 academic year	An annual release that presents high-level data on the number of entries and late unit entries and final certificates awarded for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in Wales.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 327,750 GCSE certificates were awarded in 2018-19 (a decrease of 5.1% from 2017-18). • 73,845 AS and A level certificates were awarded in 2018/19 (a decrease of 5.8%). • 14.1% of GCSE entries were late (a decrease of 6.9%). • 7.4% of AS and A level entries were late entries (a decrease of 2.1%).
Entries for GCSE in Wales: November 2019 exam series	An annual release which presents provisional data on November 2019 GCSE and Level 1/Level 2 Certificates Entries for Wales.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were 21,260 GCSE and L1/2 certificate entries in November 2019 (down 5.3% from November 2018). • Mathematics-Numeracy remains the largest November entry subject. • 83.5% of entries were for year 11 learners.

Statistical release	Description	Key statistics
Special consideration in GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: summer 2019 exam series	An annual release that presents data on the number of special consideration requests and approvals in Wales for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were 38,280 special consideration requests in summer 2019 (down 8.1% on summer 2018). • 90.1% of special consideration requests were approved in summer 2019 (up from 79.9% in summer 2018). • The proportion of assessments sat with an approved special consideration request remained stable at 3.4% (3.2% in 2018).
Reviews of marking and moderation for GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: summer 2019 exam series	An annual release that presents data on the number of reviews of marking and moderation in Wales for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.1% of all GCSE grades awarded were challenged, and 0.4% of all GCSE grades were changed in summer 2019. • 2.6% of all GCE grades awarded were challenged, and 0.4% of all GCE grades were changed in summer 2019. • 73.4% of summer 2019 reviews resulted in no mark change.
Malpractice in GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: summer 2019 exam series	An annual release that presents data on the number of malpractice penalties and offences in Wales for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 penalties were issued to students for malpractice in summer 2019 (down 5.7% compared to 210 penalties in 2018). • Proportionately more penalties were issued relating to GCSEs than AS and A levels. • Taking a mobile phone into an exam room continues to be the most common malpractice offence. • 15 penalties were issued to centre staff, and 5 to centres. This is slightly down on 2018.
Annual qualifications market report: academic year 2018 to 2019 in Wales	An annual report which summarises official statistics on the qualifications market in Wales for the academic year 2018-19.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compared to 2017-18, total certifications in 2018-19 decreased by 5.6% to 790,115. • A count of the number of recognised awarding bodies on 31 August 2019 showed a decrease of 8 (7.5%) to 99 over the last year. • WJEC awarded the most certificates in 2018-19, with 61.5% market share (up from 60.4% last year).

Statistical release	Description	Key statistics
Appeals for GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: 2018-19	An annual release that presents data on the number of appeals in Wales for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were 23 GCSE and GCE appeals submitted following the summer 2019 exam series, 10 of which were upheld. • Access arrangement and special consideration decisions were the most common grounds for appeal in summer 2019. • 75 GCSE and GCE grades were challenged as a result of an appeal and 15 grades were changed.
Provisional entries for GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: summer 2020 exam series	An annual release which presents provisional data on entries for summer 2020 GCSEs, AS, A levels, Skills Challenge Certificate, and Level 1/Level 2 Certificates for Wales.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were 307,925 GCSE entries for summer 2020. This is up by 0.7% compared to GCSE entries for summer 2019. • 88.9% of entries were from year 11 learners.
Vocational and Other Qualifications Quarterly	A quarterly release that presents data on vocational and other qualification certifications for Wales. Four releases were published throughout the year, covering quarters 2, 3 and 4 of 2019 and quarter 1 of 2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between April 2019 and March 2020, there were 373,760 certifications (a decrease of 9.1% compared to 411,075 between April 2018 and March 2019).

► MONITORING OF THE SUMMER 2020 SERIES

As well as producing statistical releases, supporting the monitoring of the summer exam series is a key area of the team's work. The cancellation of the summer exams due to the coronavirus pandemic meant that this work looked very different from other years.

The data, research and statistics work we carried out included:

- analysis of the more than 4,000 responses to our consultation on aims for standardisation and the appeals process and production of a findings report;
- arranging data sharing agreements between Qualifications Wales, Welsh Government and WJEC in order to facilitate statistical research into methods for calculating grades and analysis of results;
- analyses of Welsh Government data in relation to GCSE grades in recent years;
- our own research into potential standardisation models;
- scrutinising standardisation approaches proposed by WJEC, and providing advice on these;
- analysing centre assessment grades to understand how they compared to results in previous years;
- supporting the production of communications materials to help explain standardisation; and
- producing overviews of summer results for GCSE, AS, A level and the Skills Challenge Certificate, including results summaries, analyses of centre assessment grades and initial equalities analyses.



The coronavirus pandemic meant that this work looked very different from other years

REGULATING AWARDING BODIES

► RECOGNITION OF AWARDING BODIES

Organisations wishing to become awarding bodies recognised by us to provide qualifications in Wales need to demonstrate that they meet our Criteria for General Recognition. This means that we are confident that they are capable of meeting the requirements placed on a recognised awarding body.

Between 1 September 2019 and 31 August 2020, we reviewed four applications from organisations wanting to be recognised by us. We concluded that three applicants – Central Qualifications, ETC Awards Limited and iPET Network Limited – met the requirements of our Criteria for Recognition, and we therefore granted recognition. We also concluded that we had insufficient evidence that one applicant met the Criteria, and we therefore did not grant recognition.

Four awarding bodies – AoFA Qualifications, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, OTHM Qualifications and Recruitment and Employment Confederation Limited – chose to surrender their recognition during this period. Most of these did so because of a lack of demand for their qualifications in Wales.

Qualification-specific recognition

Following the publication of our new Criteria for Recognition to award GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in July 2019, we received four applications from existing GCSE and A level awarding bodies to gain recognition to award these qualifications. The applications met our criteria and we were able to confirm that those awarding bodies had gained recognition to be able to continue to offer GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in Wales.

NUMBER OF RECOGNISED AWARDING BODIES

31 August 2020

97



*The figure previously reported was 99

► MONITORING AWARDING BODIES

We use the following approaches to check awarding bodies' compliance and probe their systems and procedures:

- Statements of compliance and follow-up monitoring activity
- Regulatory update meetings
- Awarding body audits

We also respond to complaints about awarding bodies, and oversee how they manage incidents that may affect learners.

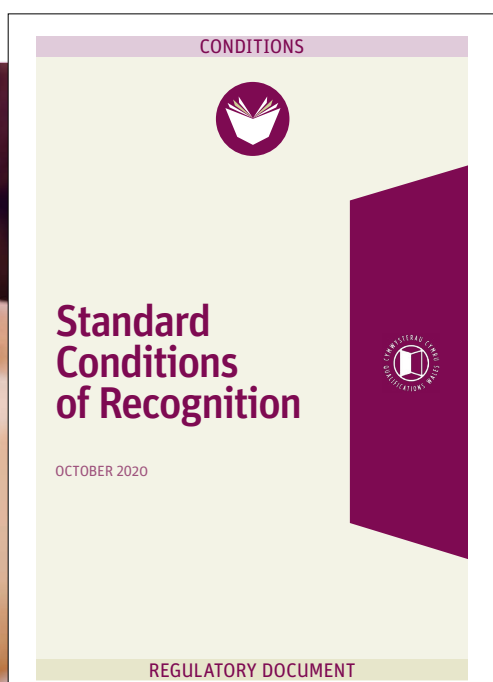
Statements of compliance

Our Standard Conditions of Recognition require all recognised awarding bodies to submit an annual statement of compliance to us. The statement is based on an awarding body's self-evaluation of its compliance status against all the Standard Conditions of Recognition.

In the 2019 statement of compliance, we asked awarding bodies to confirm in their statement of compliance their current and future compliance with our Standard Conditions of Recognition. We also asked them to provide evidence of:

- their procedures for publishing their specifications and ensuring the content meets our requirements;
- their processes for ensuring assessments are fit for purpose, appropriate for the method of assessment chosen, and consistent with the specification;
- written documentation in relation to assessments that sets out clear and unambiguous criteria against which learners' levels of attainment will be differentiated.

We received statements of compliance from all 97 awarding bodies that were asked to provide them. Awarding bodies in the process of surrendering recognition were not required to submit a statement of compliance.



Twenty-three awarding bodies declared current or likely future non-compliance, so submitted an action plan to us. We monitored these awarding bodies to ensure that they completed the required actions to return to full compliance. One of these awarding bodies chose to surrender recognition in Wales.

Fourteen awarding bodies satisfactorily completed their action plans during the year to return to full compliance. Eight awarding bodies are still working towards completing their actions to return to full compliance. Four are due to complete in October, with actions to address a range of issues, including qualification multiple-choice assessment content; improving the secure handling of assessment materials; conflicts of interest process changes; and adapting assessment through electronic provision. The remaining four are progressing through long-term projects to address issues regarding centre controls identified in Ofqual audits. We will continue to monitor these closely through the 2020 statement of compliance process.

As in the previous three years, the most frequent declared area of non-compliance was in relation to governance conditions, where eight awarding bodies declared current or future non-compliance. Most of these non-compliance declarations resulted from issues identified during regulatory activity by Ofqual. Issues highlighted included insufficient resource for centre monitoring; gaps in systems for planning and internal control; internal systems not in place for monitoring conflicts of interest; and inadequate risk management of approved centres. The awarding bodies concerned have since provided action plans and taken appropriate action to address the issues of non-compliance without the need for any further regulatory action.

[A full report on the 2019 statement of compliance is available on our website.](#)



74
current compliance
and likely future
compliance

1
current
compliance
and likely future
non-compliance

17
current non-
compliance and
likely future
compliance

5
current
non-compliance
and likely
future non-
compliance

Regulatory update meetings

These meetings help us to maintain positive working relationships with awarding bodies. We held regulatory update meetings with eight awarding bodies during this reporting year. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic reduced the number of meetings held, as awarding bodies faced other pressures during the latter half of the period.

We use the meetings to:

- discuss planned regulatory activity;
- share information on our specific processes and procedures;
- explain any regulatory changes and their implications;
- highlight any regulatory consultation; and
- understand an awarding body's internal systems and governance arrangements and its activity in Wales.

Awarding body audits

We conducted three awarding body audits during the year. One audit focused on the awarding body's capacity and capability to develop, deliver and award qualifications in accordance with our regulatory requirements.

The remaining two audits were on IT systems. They focused on:

- IT strategy and planning;
- IT risk management process;
- data protection and records management; and
- business continuity and resilience planning.

We did not identify any issues of non-compliance with our regulatory requirements, but did issue recommendations on areas for improvement.



REGULATING QUALIFICATIONS

Approval

This reporting year, we have been working on the approval of reformed qualifications in Health and Social Care, and Childcare, Construction and the Built Environment and Digital. Approval panels (which consisted of learning providers and sector experts) have reviewed draft specifications and sample assessment materials against agreed approval criteria and our Standard Conditions of Recognition. The panels consider aspects such as validity, reliability, manageability of assessment and whether the content reflects current sector good practice.

Designation

Designation is one of the ways in which we determine whether a qualification can be eligible for public funding for learners under the age of 19 in Wales. We can only designate qualifications delivered by awarding bodies that we recognise.

To obtain designation for their qualifications, awarding bodies need to meet the Standard Conditions of Recognition and provide us with assurance that:

- there is demand for the qualifications from learners in Wales;
- there is support for the qualification from relevant stakeholders, linked to the purpose of the qualification;
- references to legislation, policies and organisations are relevant in a Welsh context; and
- the qualification is appropriate for the target age range.

We have membership on the Steering Groups established by Welsh Government in relation to reviewing apprenticeship frameworks in Wales, providing information relating to the availability of designated qualifications. We also ensure that our designation processes support the availability of qualifications for use in apprenticeship frameworks in Wales, including checking that the withdrawal of any qualifications on apprenticeship frameworks does not result in potential gaps in provision.



**Number of
designated quals
as of 31 August 2020**
– 4,507

**Number of
approved quals
as of 31 August 2020**
– 183

**Number of
approved and
designated quals
that had more than 100
certifications in the year
up to 31 August 2020**
– 666

Qualifications in Wales (QiW)

Our database of Qualifications in Wales (QiW), was first built in a way that enabled us to undertake continuous improvements and to be able to respond to business and stakeholder needs.

Our QiW User Group, made up of the key stakeholders who use it on a regular basis, helps guide our work and test the impact of any changes. This reporting year, we have undertaken development work to improve functionality and user experience this year, including an enhanced search function and home page content tailored to different types of users.

Our development work means that QiW now includes data of all the qualifications we regulate – not just those eligible for use on publicly funded programmes of learning for learners up to the the age of 19, as it did previously. From October 2020, all regulated qualifications will be publicly viewable on QiW.



Qualifications in Wales

Search

Favourites

Welcome to Qualifications in Wales (QiW)

The QiW database is owned and managed by Qualifications Wales, the regulator of non-degree qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales.

QiW contains details of all qualifications that are approved or designated for teaching in Wales for learners aged under 19, excluding higher education.

Any qualifications that are approved or designated by Qualifications Wales will be eligible for funding by a Local Authority or by Welsh Government. This funding is for the education provider, not the learner.

Information held in QiW includes:

- qualification titles;
- qualification numbers;
- the Awarding Body that awards each qualification;
- qualification start and end dates;
- links to further qualification information;
- Welsh Government information including:
 - whether it counts as a choice for 14-19 Learning Pathways;
 - performance measures information;

QiW will enable you to:

- search for and view qualification records;
- save your searches;
- compare qualification information;
- export qualification data;

I would like to

Search

Sign in

Request an account

Export

Links

Centre FAQ

Welsh Government
Performance Points

(If you are unable to locate a previously designated qualification on QiW, it may have passed its Certification End Date. Performance information for such qualifications can currently only be found in this list)

Latest News



GQ MONITORING

Since September 2018, we have closely monitored the reformed GCSEs, A levels and Welsh Baccalaureate designed for Wales. During the reporting year, our monitoring has focused on the Question Paper Evaluation Committees (QPEC), where exam papers are developed for future exam series.

For the 2019 winter series (where only GCSEs and SCC are awarded), we also monitored the examiner and moderator standardisation and awarding meetings. Since March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic, we have also worked with WJEC to agree a new process for the remote monitoring of QPEC meetings.

As in previous years, we put in place arrangements with WJEC to ensure that we had clear and regular oversight of the exam series planned for summer 2020, as well as those that are due to take place in autumn 2020 and summer 2021. The Minister's decision on 18 March 2020 to close schools and the subsequent decision to cancel the summer 2020 exam series has meant that the level of monitoring was reduced significantly.

For GCSE and A level qualifications, our monitoring focused on WJEC's compliance with our Standard Conditions of Recognition. This was based on compliance with their own procedures for QPEC meetings, examiner/moderator standardisation conferences, awarding and post-awards service. The level of monitoring we undertake is also based on feedback from centres and our annual 'Have Your Say' questionnaire. If necessary, we scrutinise selected qualifications in more depth, to consider the content and assessment of those qualifications in more detail.

The level of monitoring of the Skills Challenge Certificate has been reduced, due to the stability of the grade boundaries over several series, and the fact that there are no significant concerns regarding the delivery or award of the qualification. As a result, our monitoring focused on WJEC's compliance with the Standard Conditions of Recognition, based on compliance with their own procedures. Our monitoring of the SCC focused on the award of each series for the KS4 and Advanced qualifications.

During our observations, we did not identify any areas of noncompliance, and found that WJEC's procedures were generally robust and applied consistently.

GQ monitoring events (1 September 2019 – 31 August 2020)

Type of meeting	GCSE	GCE	SCC	Total
QPEC	31	10	0	41
Standardisation (conference events)	25	0	0	25
Awarding	5	0	2	7
			Grand total	73

MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS

► WINTER SERIES 2019-20

We maintained a careful oversight of procedures to ensure that appropriate standards were maintained for the GCSE exams taken in November 2019 and January 2020.

This involved monitoring of awarding meetings, to ensure WJEC was compliant with the rules set out for awarding GCSEs according to the established processes.

We set requirements for the submission of data to us in the Data Exchange document. We also worked with WJEC to understand the ongoing challenges presented by changes in entry strategies in the qualifications involved.

We agreed outcomes with WJEC via Maintenance of Standards meetings in January and February.

► GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The reformed GCSE English Language qualification, which was first awarded in 2017 is different, in structure and content, from its predecessor.

Changes in the entry patterns over recent years have made the award of this qualification challenging. Although we expect grade boundaries to move to some extent when new qualifications are introduced, the movements in English Language have been greater than expected. The fluctuations in the grade boundaries, particularly at grade C, together with significant changes to the overall results, have affected public confidence in the qualification.

In Summer 2019, although the grade boundary was almost the same as it was in 2017, there was a significant decrease in the number of students receiving a C grade.

With these factors in mind, we proposed the following two areas of work, beginning in July 2019.

- We required WJEC to review the qualification – specifically the assessment design and how it was functioning, to establish whether there are any aspects of the qualification that should be amended. We discussed the approaches to be taken with WJEC, as we were both conscious of the need to avoid further instability.
- We planned to explore the concerns expressed by the awarding committee about the standard of writing seen in the assessments. This work would involve the consideration of learners' work with a wider stakeholder group.

Events related to the coronavirus have resulted in this exploratory work being suspended. We will reconsider our approach in due course.

► MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

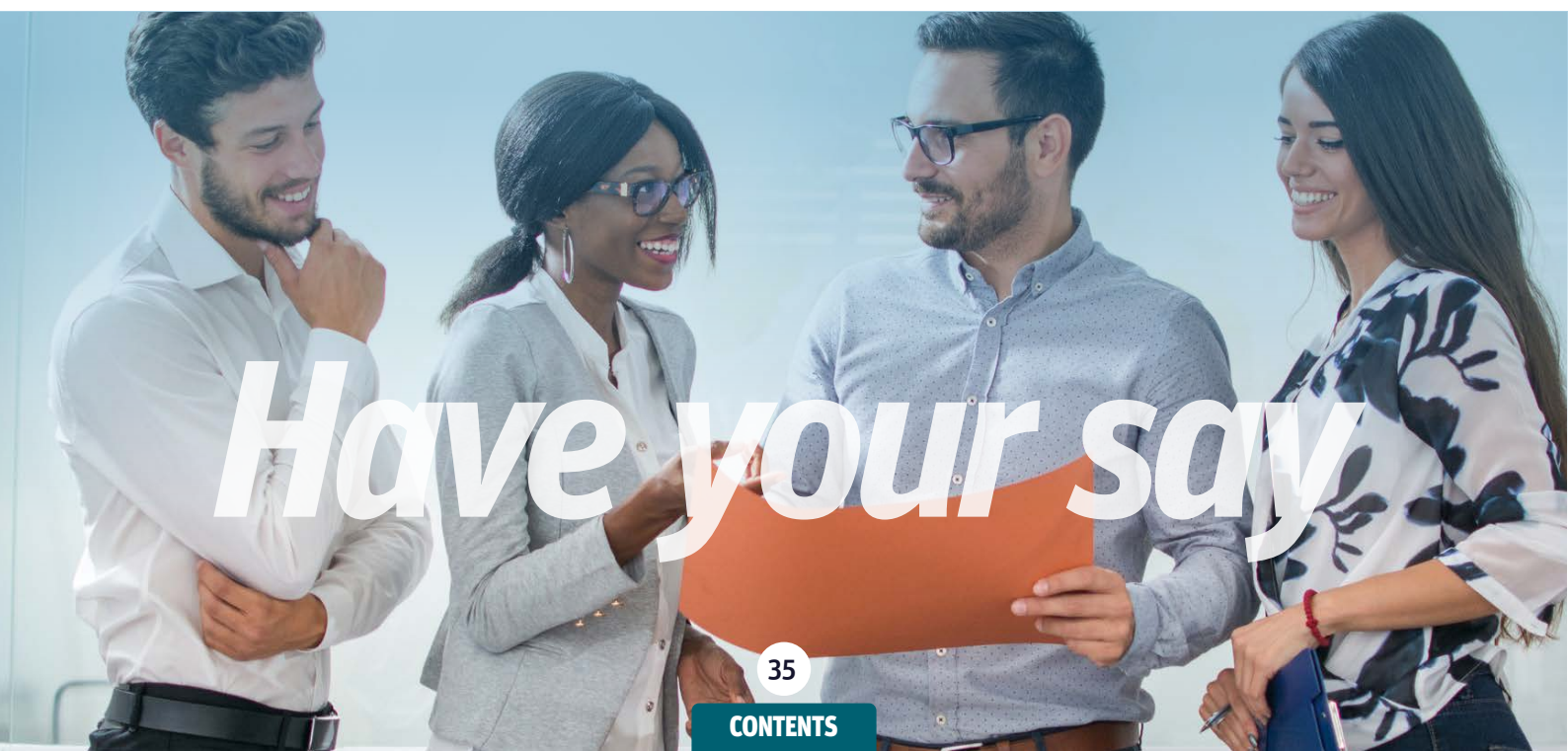
In 2019, feedback that we received on the summer exam series suggested that GCSE assessments for modern foreign languages (MFL) were too demanding. Following this feedback, together with further discussions with stakeholders, we wanted to review the level of challenge presented by the approved GCSE MFL specifications in Wales.

We secured the work of a subject expert to carry out analysis of the specifications, comparing them with legacy specifications and a specification from another large awarding body. We also reflected on feedback from our own research into teacher perceptions of the approved specifications, as well as other feedback we received from our 'Have Your Say' questionnaire.

In light of our initial findings from this work, we asked WJEC to work with practitioners to review the GCSE MFL specifications, and to consider whether adjustments might be necessary for the qualifications to present a more suitable level of challenge. At the same time, we continued to analyse outcomes and grade boundary positions over a number of years, to support potential adjustments.

At the beginning of 2020, WJEC presented proposals to us that would reduce the breadth of the specifications, making them more accessible to learners. This, in turn, would improve their experience of studying for the qualifications. We agreed with these proposals for adjustment to the GCSE MFL specifications, which would take place over a period of time, to allow for teachers to plan for any changes.

Events related to the coronavirus pandemic have resulted in this exploratory work being suspended. We will reconsider our approach in due course.



VQ MONITORING

Health and social care

In September 2019, the first qualifications in the new suite of qualifications in Health and Social Care, and Childcare (HSC) for Wales were taught for the first time. We approved these qualifications to be the only qualifications that can be funded for learners up to the age of 19, and those on apprenticeships in Wales.

Throughout the year, we have closely monitored these new qualifications by observing question-paper and task development, examiner standardisation meetings and continuing professional development (CPD) events for teachers and assessors. We have also observed the awarding bodies' processes for training external quality assurers (EQAs). The monitoring activities have enabled us to ensure that these high-profile qualifications are compliant with our regulatory requirements (Standard Conditions of Recognition) and that we are aware of any risks to the successful delivery of these qualifications.

Health and safety

During 2019, we reviewed health and safety qualifications offered in Wales, focusing on level 2 qualifications in health and safety and manual handling. Overall, we were satisfied that the assessments were valid and led to reliable outcomes. We found that the content of the qualifications was fit for purpose and reflected current health and safety practice. Awarding bodies' approaches to assessment were suitable, and the level of demand was appropriate. Centre management and quality-assurance processes were generally found to be robust across awarding bodies.

Through the review, we identified some areas of non-compliance in areas such as question-setting and the clarity of information available for teachers and assessors. In late 2019 and early 2020, we worked with awarding bodies to resolve these issues. Awarding bodies undertook activities that included redrafting questions and improving their qualification handbooks to provide clearer information about assessment. As a result of these activities, we were satisfied that all of the identified areas of non-compliance were resolved.

During the year, we observed the following in relation to Health and Social Care, and Childcare qualifications:

25
question paper
development and
meetings

20
teacher and
assessor events

4
EQA training
meetings

2
examiner
standardisation
meetings

2
awarding
meetings

INCIDENT NOTIFICATIONS

Awarding bodies must notify us of any incident that is likely to lead to an adverse effect for students, or that threatens the integrity of a regulated qualification. When we receive a notification, we check that the awarding body has taken appropriate steps to reduce the impact on students and to prevent a recurrence.

Throughout the reporting year, we monitored issues that could arise in any assessment series, such as errors in assessment materials, or a breach in the security of an examination paper. From March 2020 onwards, we also monitored a range of new risks to learners in Wales as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The majority of incident reports that we received during the year related either to minor issues, or resulted in no significant impact on learners in Wales. We worked alongside Ofqual to manage the risks posed by the coronavirus pandemic to ensure that learners in Wales were not treated differently to others throughout the UK.

Incidents relating to the summer examination series usually account for a significant amount of the total incidents in a given year. The cancellation of the summer examination series in 2020 means that the incidents for this reporting year are not directly comparable to those in previous years. Security breaches and question paper errors typically account for a large proportion of incidents each year (60% of incidents in 2018-19). The disruption to this summer's exams reduced the frequency of these types of issues, which accounted for 18% of incidents this year. However, new risks relating to operational disruption and the issuing of results promptly and accurately using novel approaches became more prevalent as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. These issues account for 54% of notifications this year.

The pandemic has affected the qualifications system throughout the UK. We worked with other UK regulators to ensure a consistent and fair approach to mitigate against the adverse effects of the pandemic. We established new processes to manage events relating to the pandemic as the situation evolved.

We categorise the types of incidents as follows:

	Number of incidents notified
Marking – issues concerning the process of marking the evidence submitted in an assessment and issuing results	50
Coronavirus – operational disruption resulting from the coronavirus pandemic	49
Malpractice – where intentional improper or negligent acts are committed (either by learners or by centres in Wales)	21
Question paper errors – issues in any material used for assessment purposes	17
Security breach – any event whereby sensitive material is compromised	15
Governance – events relating to an awarding body's management of risk and resources	7
Customer service – issues about the information and service an awarding body offers its customers	3
Other – incidents that do not fit into any of the above types	20
Total	182

We monitored these incidents to make sure that awarding bodies followed regulatory guidance during the pandemic, and that adverse effects for learners were prevented or mitigated as far as possible.

There were 50 events relating to the marking of assessments. Of these, 35 cases related to the issue of incorrect results or risks to the timeliness of results. We monitored the actions awarding bodies took to ensure that valid and reliable results were issued to all students with minimal delays, and that no student suffered an adverse effect.

Awarding bodies are required to take all reasonable steps to prevent malpractice. Where there is an allegation of malpractice, awarding bodies are required to investigate. If cases of malpractice are found to have occurred, awarding bodies are required to take action.

There were 22 malpractice investigations involving centres in Wales during this reporting year. We closely monitored the actions that were taken to manage each reported malpractice incident.

Actions that an awarding body may take include:



Events relating to the pandemic are categorised in the following table:

	Number of incidents notified
Mitigation change – requests by awarding bodies to change published mitigation strategies for specific qualifications	15
Delayed assessments – notifications of delays to scheduled assessments in March and April 2020*	14
Adaptation – proposals by an awarding body to adapt assessments to facilitate delivery where appropriate*	8
Delays issuing certificates – delays printing and delivering qualification certificates*	6
Estimate – proposals by an awarding body to calculate qualification outcomes for students	4
Other – other potential adverse effects for learners, standards or public confidence as a result of disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic	2
Total	49

* Proposals to adapt, estimate or delay assessments were only notifiable before the Extraordinary Regulatory Framework came into force. These figures do not capture all adapted, estimated or delayed assessments in Wales.

Awarding bodies made findings of malpractice or maladministration in eight cases, and found allegations were unsubstantiated in one case. There were 13 cases still under investigation at the time of writing.

Where an incident of malpractice has affected students, we ensure that the awarding body has taken appropriate action to minimise the impact of the incident and to prevent future recurrences, wherever possible.

Of the 15 security breaches, 10 originated from within centres. Only five of these originated from centres in Wales, and no students were affected adversely. In cases where the breach originated outside Wales, there was no adverse effect on learners in Wales.

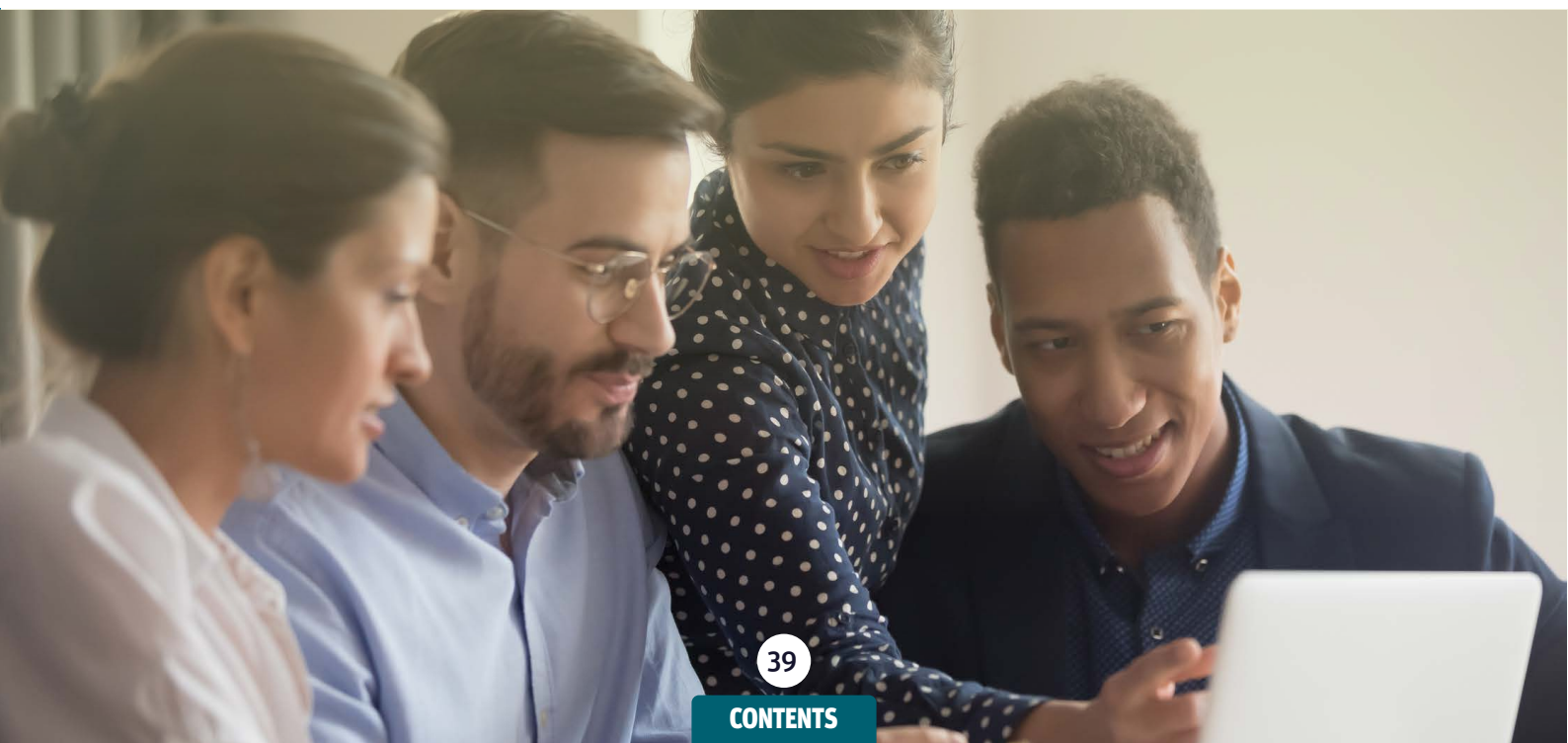
There were 17 question paper errors reported to us during the reporting year across all awarding bodies. Most question paper errors reported to us were minor, and did not prevent students from answering the question (e.g. a typographical or formatting error in a question, in which the intention of the question was still clear).

Complaints about awarding bodies

Complaints are an important source of feedback about the qualifications system and individual awarding bodies. If we identify shortcomings during our investigation into a complaint, we make sure that appropriate action is taken to strengthen the qualifications system.

We require all awarding bodies to have effective complaints-handling procedures, to give learners and centres a route to raise their concerns directly. Before we consider the case as a regulator, we expect complainants to give the awarding body an opportunity to look into the complaint and, where appropriate, put things right.

In October and November 2019, we completed our investigation of two complaints received in the previous reporting year, about the way awarding bodies investigate malpractice. We upheld one complaint that an awarding body had failed to investigate malpractice rigorously. We partially upheld a second complaint that an awarding body's malpractice investigation and appeals procedure lacked transparency for the subject of the allegations.



We received 17 new complaints about awarding bodies this year. Of these, one complaint fell within the scope of our Complaints about Awarding Bodies policy. We upheld the complaint about an awarding body's appeals procedure.

We did not accept the other 16 cases for investigation because they:

- raised concerns about a centre, which we referred to the awarding body for investigation (one case);
- had not been considered through the awarding body's internal complaints procedure and were referred to the awarding body in the first instance (nine cases);
- raised concerns outside our scope of regulation (six cases).

Whistleblowing to the regulator (disclosures)

Qualifications Wales is a prescribed body to which whistleblowing allegations can be made. We are required to report on disclosures received between 1 April and 31 March each year.

In the 2019-20 reporting period, we received one qualifying disclosure as a prescribed body, which we dealt with in accordance with our Regulatory Whistleblowing Policy. We accepted the disclosure for investigation. Our investigation found the evidence did not substantiate the allegations made to us.

We are grateful for all information and intelligence that helps to ensure that regulated qualifications in Wales are effective and command public confidence.

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REGULATORY POLICY

► REGULATORY POLICY REVIEWS AND DEVELOPMENTS

During the year, we developed new regulatory approaches and completed the following policy reviews.

- **GCSE Recognition**

In August 2019, we introduced Criteria for Recognition to award GCSEs, AS and A levels; four awarding bodies became formally recognised to award these by December 2019. In addition to introducing new Criteria, we also revised the Additional Standard Conditions for GCSE/GCE qualifications and Additional Standard Conditions for the Skills Challenge Certificate (Welsh Baccalaureate) to align with our new approach. We also updated the Recognition Policy and General Criteria for Recognition. Putting controls in place has meant that we have further protected the interests of learners in Wales and secured public confidence in these important qualifications.

- **Welsh-medium and bilingual qualifications policy**

This regulatory document contains the requirements we place on recognised awarding bodies when they develop, deliver and award Welsh-medium qualifications. As well as conducting a policy review, we also completed a review of the Welsh language support grant landscape. Our 'Qualified for the future' consultation also fed into this workstream; as a result, we developed a new strategy, *Choice for All*, setting out our commitment to increasing the availability of Welsh-medium qualifications, which was published in July 2020.

- **Standard Conditions of Recognition**

We conducted a comprehensive review of the Conditions that apply to all the awarding bodies that we recognise. This resulted in a public consultation, decisions report and a revised set of Conditions published in February 2020.

- **Regulatory Appeals Policy**

Following a thorough review of our approach, the Board approved the revised policy, which was published in April 2019. The review brought about important changes, including clarifying the scope of the policy itself, and its relationships with the corporate complaints policy, which was also amended.

- **Fee Capping Policy**

We first published an interim Fee Capping policy statement in June 2016. This enabled us to exercise our functions promptly following our establishment in September 2015. In line with our planned programme of policy reviews, we consulted on changes to a suite of regulatory policies relating to enforcement matters in 2018-19. Following a thorough review and research project, the last of these, the Fee Capping policy, has been revised, and came into force in June 2020.

► REGULATORY POLICY PUBLICATIONS

During the year, around 17 regulatory documents were revised, updated and published.

- **Regulatory Documents List**

Changes were made due to the publication of a suite of approval criteria linked to our sector reviews, the introduction of new statistical/data requirements, and changes to reflect our requirements and approach in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

- **Standard Conditions of Recognition**

We introduced a new Condition (A2) in light of the UK leaving the European Union. This was to ensure that existing awarding bodies remained compliant with our requirements, while we also remain compliant with EU requirements during this transitional period, before any new arrangements are introduced.

- **Centre Scrutiny**

On 12 February 2020, we published changes to our Standard Conditions of Recognition and Additional Standard Conditions of Recognition for GCSE/GCE qualifications to strengthen our requirements on the controls awarding bodies have in place over centre-assessment judgements.

- **The Priority Qualifications List**

The List was updated to reflect our qualification reforms, for example, the introduction of a new GCSE in Digital Technology and reforming the Skills Challenge Certificate.

► REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS (RIA)

As an organisation, we have developed an integrated approach to impact-assessing our regulatory decisions, where all potential impacts are considered together into one assessment. These include the principal aims and eight matters of the Qualifications Wales Act, our Well-being of Future Generations objectives, as well as considering the impacts of our proposals on children and young people, Welsh-speakers, people with protected characteristics, socio-economic status, and the awarding bodies that we regulate. We have formulated a new RIA tool and guidance, and staff completed training in December 2019 on using these.

During the reporting period, we completed 18 Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) on a range of topics: 13 of these were related to our work on the summer 2020 series. Two integrated impact assessments were included as part of published public consultations (namely for *Qualified for the Future* and changes to our Standard Conditions of Recognition).

This reporting year, we have also developed a new approach to cost-benefit analysis, which brings a quantitative dimension to our assessments. We have created a tool for calculating both the net present value and benefit-cost ratio, which has allowed us to innovate by way of integrating non-monetised impacts within our decision-making tool. Overall, the new approach is enhancing our decision-making, which in turn has a wider impact in terms of benefits for learners and the qualifications system in Wales.



CORPORATE SERVICES

Making sure our organisation runs smoothly and effectively is the role of our corporate services directorate. The way in which we carry out our business reflects our culture and who we are. Our employees are at the heart of our organisation, and their well-being is essential for our success.

We have incorporated the Future Generations ‘ways of working’ into our thinking and our approach to working with others in the education system. Similarly, we are demonstrating our commitment to inclusivity and to the Welsh language.

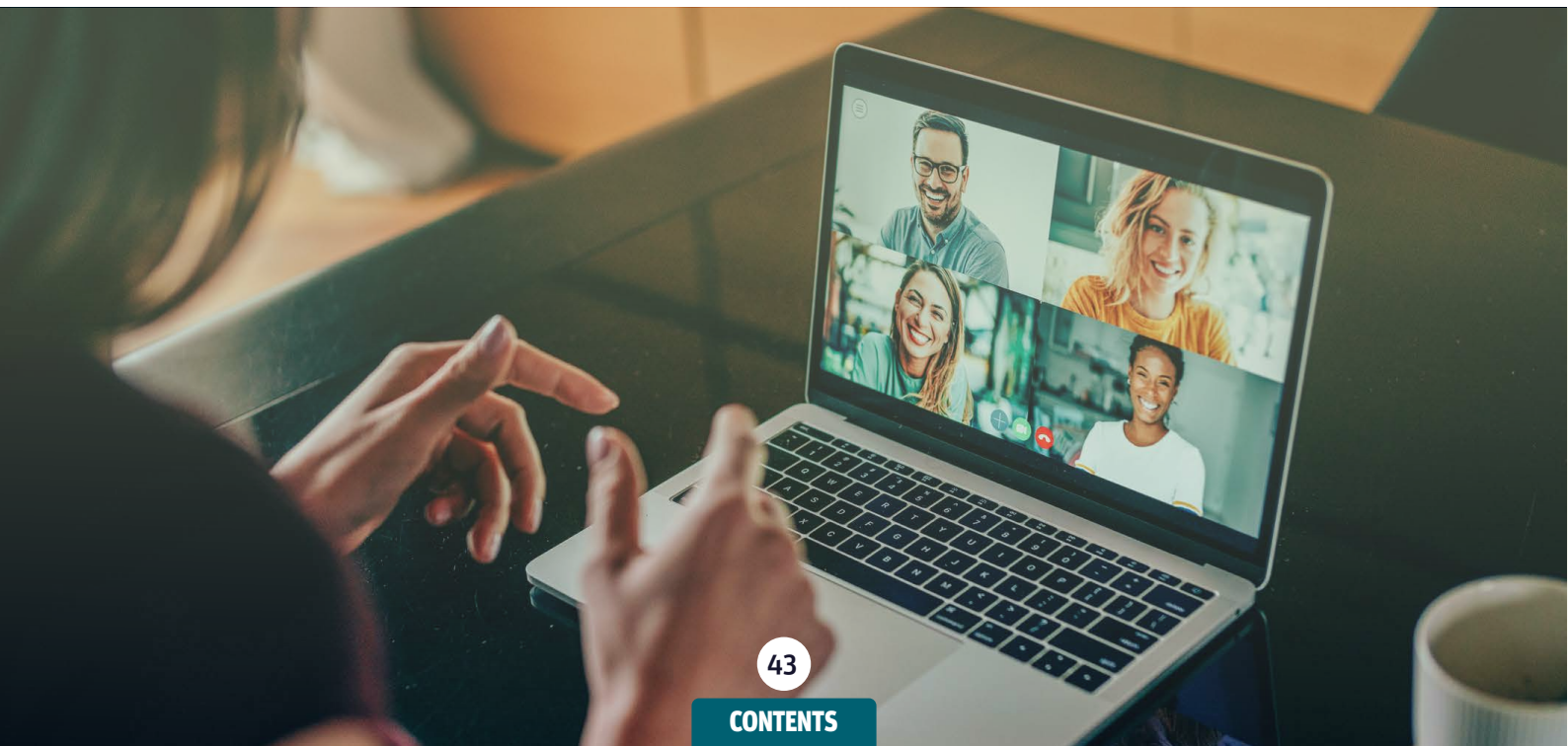
► CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The coronavirus pandemic has presented unique challenges. It has brought our business continuity planning into sharp focus, enabling us to continue working effectively during lockdown.

Our IT infrastructure has allowed us to work from home. In March, we took steps to ensure employees had the equipment they needed well in advance of lockdown. We have monitored this and responded to ongoing Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessments.

During this period, we have maintained effective financial controls. We produced a full set of unqualified accounts on time and in accordance with the Government’s Financial Reporting Manual. We have also taken care to ensure suppliers continue to receive prompt payment, paying 98% of our invoices within the statutory timescales. Having identified that our cleaners would be vulnerable to reduced income, we followed Cabinet Office and Welsh Government advice (Procurement Policy Note 02/20) and maintained regular payments.

To keep our employees feeling engaged with the organisation, we hold regular virtual ‘Town Hall’ meetings for all staff via Zoom, drop-in coffee sessions, and social photo competitions on our internal Sharepoint site.



Recognising that many employees have caring responsibilities, we took the decision to allow them to top-up their flexi-time where needed and to relax core hours. Although only a few employees used the top-up, all employees reported that knowing it was available had significantly reduced the pressure they were under during this extraordinary time.

We ran a survey in June to assess our colleagues' views on returning to the office. It found that 61% preferred to continue to work from home, rather than return to the office at that time. Employees were generally positive about how the organisation had managed the change, and many had seen an improvement in their work-life balance.

Our working arrangements allowed us to continue to deliver most of our usual work during lockdown. We responded to the Minister for Education's decision in March to cancel the 2020 exam series. We coped with the additional pressures of taking the decisions required to enable the award of summer 2020 qualifications and plan for 2021. Numerous extraordinary Board and Committee meetings were held, and employees worked hard to properly evaluate and present options, and test statistical models, which allowed us to make robust recommendations.

The commitment shown by all our employees and Board members is a testament to our positive organisational culture and our values.

► AN INCLUSIVE ORGANISATION

We have set out to build an inclusive culture that recognises individual talents and backgrounds, protected characteristics, language preferences, and different perspectives – both among our staff and our stakeholders. We recognise that people who feel included are more engaged and motivated to contribute, and this also has a positive impact on their own well-being. We have regular partnership meetings with representatives of our recognised trade union, which is helpful in providing another channel for staff to raise any queries or issues.



This reporting year, we were pleased to see our equalities objectives come to life as we concluded our first work placement for an individual with disabilities. This was successful, and the placement became a fixed-term administrative appointment, which successfully ran until September. We are committed to working with Remploy again to offer similar opportunities.

We have published our [Strategic Equalities progress report 2019-20](#), which details our work this year.

The highlights include:

- running our disability work placement scheme;
- gaining Disability Confident status as an employer;
- delivering training to employees and Board members on how to support disability in the workplace;
- tendering disposals of our IT equipment to supported businesses (those with 50% plus disabled staff);
- 91% of employees agreeing that they were treated with respect by those they work with (2019 survey);
- 86% of employees believing that our organisation respects individual differences (2019 survey);
- promoting awareness of [‘Fair Access by Design’](#) guidance at our 2019 awarding bodies’ forum;
- revising our regulatory impact assessment approach to integrate equalities considerations and carrying out integrated RIAs on all major regulatory decisions;
- producing our [Qualified for the future](#) consultation with easy-read and youth-friendly versions and running focus groups within the community;



- signing the ‘Dying to Work Charter’ and running cancer awareness training for employees;
- reviewing and improving the accessibility of our website;
- maintaining good relations with Remploy, the Race Equality Council, the Equalities and Human Rights Council, Stonewall, Chwarae Teg, SEWEC (South East Wales Equality network) and SEWREC (South East Wales Racial Equality Council).

We have also improved our website to ensure that we are compliant with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. We introduced software to enable visually-impaired users to access the information, and we commissioned the Digital Accessibility Centre to complete an audit of the website to identify further improvements for the coming year.

In July 2020, we published our first progress report against our Welsh Language, which included the following highlights.

- Our *Qualified for the future* engagement included 13 bilingual sessions including some targeted at young people. When we issued the consultation, 50 of the 667 responses received were in Welsh.
- We produced 74 publications, all bilingual.
- We issued 359 social media posts, all bilingual.
- We provided ‘Welsh Language in context’ course attended by 35 employees. Twenty-nine employees also undertook on-line training, and we supported three employees on residential training.
- We produced fully bilingual [online invigilator training](#) for exams officers.

► EQUALITY OBJECTIVES 2019-22

Regulation: regulated qualifications are designed and assessed in a way that is fair for all learners.

Engagement: we communicate, engage, consult and conduct research with diverse groups, which means we benefit from a wide range of views.

People: our workforce and Board reflect the diversity of the population in Wales that we regulate for and work amongst.

Culture: we continue to build a culture where people feel that the organisation values them as individuals, appreciates their differences and makes good use of the range of experiences and insight available.

Continuous improvement: we maintain the progress we have made in embedding equality into how we operate, and we take opportunities to continue to improve.

► SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

In March 2019, we achieved a bronze level award in the Corporate Health Standard. This is a national mark of quality for health and well-being in the workplace, awarded by Public Health Wales.

An employee working group – QWEST (Qualifications Wales Well-being, Equality and Social Team) was established to support the organisation and drive forward well-being in the workplace. We are now working towards the Corporate Health Standard silver level award. During the last 12 months, we have supported campaigns including ‘Dry January’, ‘Learning at Work Week’, ‘Happiness at Work Week’ and ‘Mental Health Week’. During ‘Happiness at Work Week’, we hosted a coffee morning, raising £240 for Mind Cymru.

We offer our staff a free office fruit scheme and support nutritional campaigns throughout the year. We funded seasonal flu vaccinations in October 2019, and our occupational health provider visited in January for one-to-one assessments, including cholesterol checks. During lockdown, we continued to promote well-being, sharing messages to help maintain good mental health. Physical activity was encouraged in May for National Walking Month and we have also delivered Menopause Awareness and Mindfulness sessions online.

In our 2019 People Survey, 94% of employees agreed that we promote health and well-being messages and information to employees, and 88% felt that we support their health and well-being.

► PEOPLE SURVEY

In October each year, we run an annual People Survey based on that used across the Civil Service. We were particularly pleased to see our engagement score in 2019 return to **76% after a drop of 4% in the previous year.**

Some areas where we improved scores this year:

Organisational Culture improved overall by **+7** to **86%**, with **95%** of employees agreeing that they are trusted to carry out their job effectively.

The leadership statement improved by **+9** to **79%**, with **86%** of employees saying that their manager and senior managers lead their team and QW with confidence.

94% of employees are interested in their work, **96%** understand our purpose and **91%** understand how their work contributes to QW’s objectives.

97% of employees say their manager is considerate of their life outside work and **91%** say that they are treated with respect by their colleagues.



We worked with employees to identify priority areas to improve.

- **Learning and development** – whilst scores had improved, we set out to better promote the wide range of opportunities available and share employee development experiences. Our union learning representatives helped us to relaunch webpage information and deliver ‘Lite Bite’ sessions, an opportunity for employees to share details about their work with colleagues in different teams.
- We established a working group of our **Band 3 employees** to review four areas of concern: parity of workload/work type; fear of challenge; career progression and how teams within the organisation can work more effectively together. The group have presented their recommendations, which we are considering.
- Promotion of **internal communications methods** and approach.
- **Performance development** – we launched our redesigned Performance and Development policy in July; training in ‘Giving and Receiving Feedback’ will follow in the autumn.

▶ A LEARNING ORGANISATION

Our People Strategy outlines our commitment to building skills and capability. This year, our training has included the following.

- **Health and safety**

We have run first aid training, mandatory online manual handling training for all staff and fire safety training.

- **Information technology**

Employees undertook an online Information Security refresher, and we have also supported individuals to access to online Microsoft modules.

- **Project management**

Several colleagues attended a session focusing on the use of MS Project to support the planning work in relation to the *Qualified for the future* project.

- **Well-being and equalities**

In February, we delivered ‘**Cancer in the Workplace**’ training, working with Macmillan Cancer Support. Although focused specifically on cancer, the training also covered approaches that would support an individual who was unwell with a serious condition, as well as training colleagues to support each other and managers to support their teams.

- We are **Stonewall Cymru Diversity Champions**, and we recently held the first of three sessions to raise awareness and increase understanding of LGBT issues and unconscious bias. We have also run a **Menopause Awareness** session and an introduction to **Mindfulness**.

- We have delivered **Regulatory Impact Assessment training** to a proportion of our Senior Leadership Group, along with employees involved with the work on curriculum reform.

- Our Board Member, Isabel Nisbet, delivered a session on **Fairness in Assessment**.

- **Administration**

We delivered minute-taking training to a small cohort.

- **Welsh language learning**

We have continued to fund individuals in personal study, as well as promoting the online learning modules developed by the National Centre for Learning Welsh. Three employees attended residential sessions. In September 2019, we delivered **'Welsh Language in Context'** training in partnership with Ateb, to raise awareness of the history of the use of Welsh and build and develop employee understanding of the Welsh Language Standards.

- **Personal development**

In the last year, we have supported four employees in higher education learning, and committed to support a further four from September.

- Several employees in Qualifications Officer and Manager roles also undertook online **training in educational assessment.**
- We are supporting an employee through her studies to achieve her **AAT Advanced Diploma.** Similarly, we supported an individual in professional learning with the CIPR and PRCA, which resulted in her progression to a permanent communications role. We have also appointed a **Digital Apprentice** for the first time; this role will commence in September.
- Employees have attended external training and conferences to develop and enhance their professional skills and maintain their CPD in fields such as procurement, corporate governance, HR, finance, research and communications.

We support our trade union colleagues to attend courses to ensure that they have the knowledge and ability to undertake their union roles. In our 2019 People Survey, 80% of respondents considered they could access the right learning and development opportunities when they needed to, and 72% agreed that these activities helped them to improve performance.



► PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Qualifications Wales and the PCS Union branch within the organisation have signed a partnership agreement and actively work collaboratively to live the aims and principles of this agreement. Union representatives are supported and encouraged to take what training they need to fulfil their union roles. The recent agreement of a union time policy, confirming paid time for union duties, demonstrates our recognition of the importance and contribution of union members.

Ceri Phillips – Union Chair



During the uncertain times of the coronavirus pandemic, the strength of our partnership working at QW has been invaluable to our union members.

Members have regularly praised the support and care for their wellbeing they have experienced as they balance caring responsibilities, working from home and changes in workload.

The Qualifications Wales executive have worked collaboratively with the union chair, Health and Safety reps and Union Learning reps to ensure members feel listened to, safe in their working environment and that they have ongoing support to learn and develop.

As a union, we very much welcome this continued positive approach to our partnership working and facing together the challenges the ‘new normal’ will bring.

► SUPPORTING OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

In 2019, we offered employees one day a year to use to work within the local community to support our **Future Generations** objectives. This was our first full year of activity, after initial engagement last year. We expanded our links with local organisations, as well as the range of activity and involvement which our staff have up to one day each year to focus effort on.

Colleagues have forged a good relationship with our neighbours from the Duffryn community by joining forces with **Celtic Horizons Litter Pickers** for environmental improvement. This was our starting point for corporate social responsibility activities, and, together with new links with Keep Wales Tidy, it has proved valuable this year.

Our approach also led to the community offering a range of other ways to work alongside them during the last 12 months, including woodland clearing, fence-painting, ditch-cleaning, building outdoor learning spaces and sharing skills. In January, we hosted a successful multi-generation event for **Re-engage** (formerly Contact the Elderly), which saw isolated older people invited from across south Wales to join us for a social afternoon of tea, cake, chat and entertainment.

We also worked with **Help the Homeless in Newport**, spending time helping out at the homelessness centre. Colleagues donated Christmas shoeboxes of essentials and 30 coats for the winter Wrap Up Newport campaign, as well as collecting for the charity’s secret garden project.

“Thank you so much for organising the afternoon tea at Qualifications Wales - everyone enjoyed themselves, and the children were great. What a difference it makes having varying ages together! It turns the normal into special.”

Marion Lowther, Development Officer, Re-engage

“Hearing the stories of the service-users that I met brought home to me how the smallest acts of kindness can make a huge difference when people find themselves in difficult, precarious situations and are vulnerable and afraid. So glad I chose to take part in this, and many thanks for organising it.”

Susan Price, Qualifications Assistant

► INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION

In delivering our corporate functions, we work closely with other Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies (WGSBs) to benefit from shared experiences and efficiencies, attending the Heads of Resources, IT, HR, finance and procurement networks.

Our IT team continues to provide IT support under a Service Level Agreement to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales and the National Academy for Educational Leadership. These organisations follow the same IT set-up as Qualifications Wales, and were therefore also able to work effectively from home. The income from these activities is currently funding a new Digital Apprentice post.

This year, we have worked with colleagues from Sports Wales, Social Care Wales and HEFCW to award a collaborative contract for the development of a shared leadership and management programme. This will be available for employees from the four core organisations and offered to others from other WGSBs.



“Leaderful Action, working in partnership with Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies, is delighted to launch THRIVE: a 12-month bespoke strategic leadership development programme to develop the skills, behaviours and mindsets needed for our managers/ leaders, their teams and organisations and, in turn, our country, to thrive.

The THRIVE: Line Management Essentials and Strategic Leadership programmes both provide a unique opportunity for managers and leaders in the Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies to come together to learn and reflect; form valuable networks and share experience, ideas and best practice. The programmes will be engaging, pragmatic and inspiring; blending current and proven theory with practical takeaway tools. It has been great to see the Welsh Sponsored Bodies working in collaboration to make this a success”.

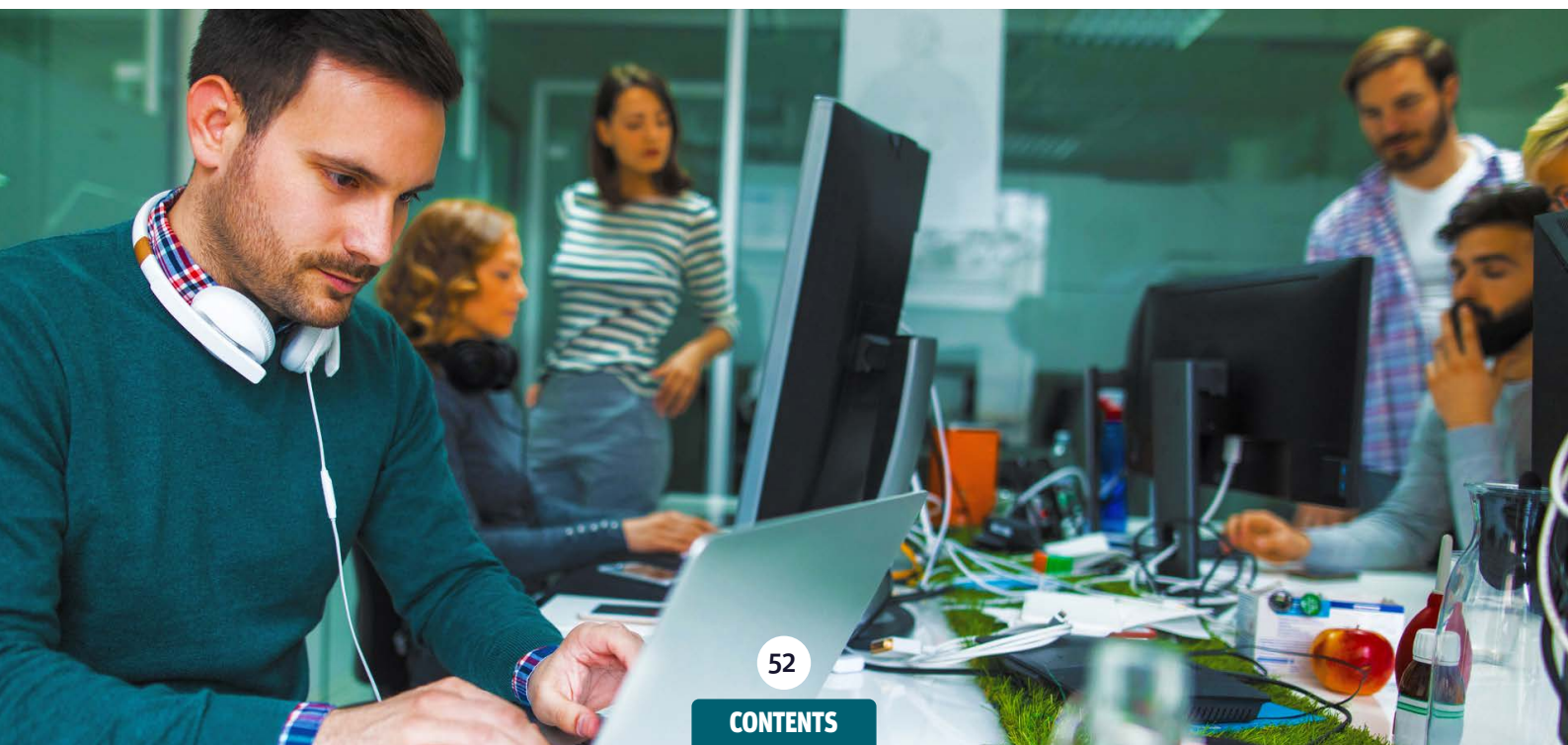
Cath Attree, Learning Projects Manager, Leaderful Action

This programme is the first of its kind and will start in autumn 2020 – we look forward to seeing our employees benefit from gaining new skills, sharing experiences and developing relationships with peers across the public sector.

► AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE ORGANISATION

We receive grant funding from Welsh Government each financial year to meet the vast majority of our operational costs. This is supplemented by the small amount of income we generate when recovering our costs from providing IT support services to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales and the National Academy for Educational Leadership.

Our strategic challenge is to effectively use these annual funding allocations to deliver a complex, longer-term programme of activities, with timescales that span across financial years and are regularly influenced by wider changes within the qualifications system in Wales and the UK.



We maintain a flexible, medium-term finance plan to create annual budget allocations that match our anticipated programme phasing and grant awards. Acknowledging the funding challenges facing the public sector, this plan also allows us to assess and demonstrate the impact of potential changes to our funding levels. We then assess how movements or clarifications in timescales impact on in-year and medium-term financial models, and ‘flex’ our budgets accordingly within each annual allocation. Information on how we spent our 2019-20 allocation is provided within our [Annual Accounts](#). Together with regular reviews and dialogue, this has enabled us to better manage some of the pressures on our capacity and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Our annual spending continues to increase each year (£7.495m in 2017-18, £7.844m in 2018-19, £8.315m in 2019-20), and for 2020-21, we set an initial budget requirement of £9.375m. The 2020-21 budget increase was largely due to our continuing and growing work to consider how qualifications for 16-year-olds need to change to support the new curriculum. Welsh Government have acknowledged that this review and reform programme, and our associated funding need, will continue for the next few years alongside the new curriculum development.

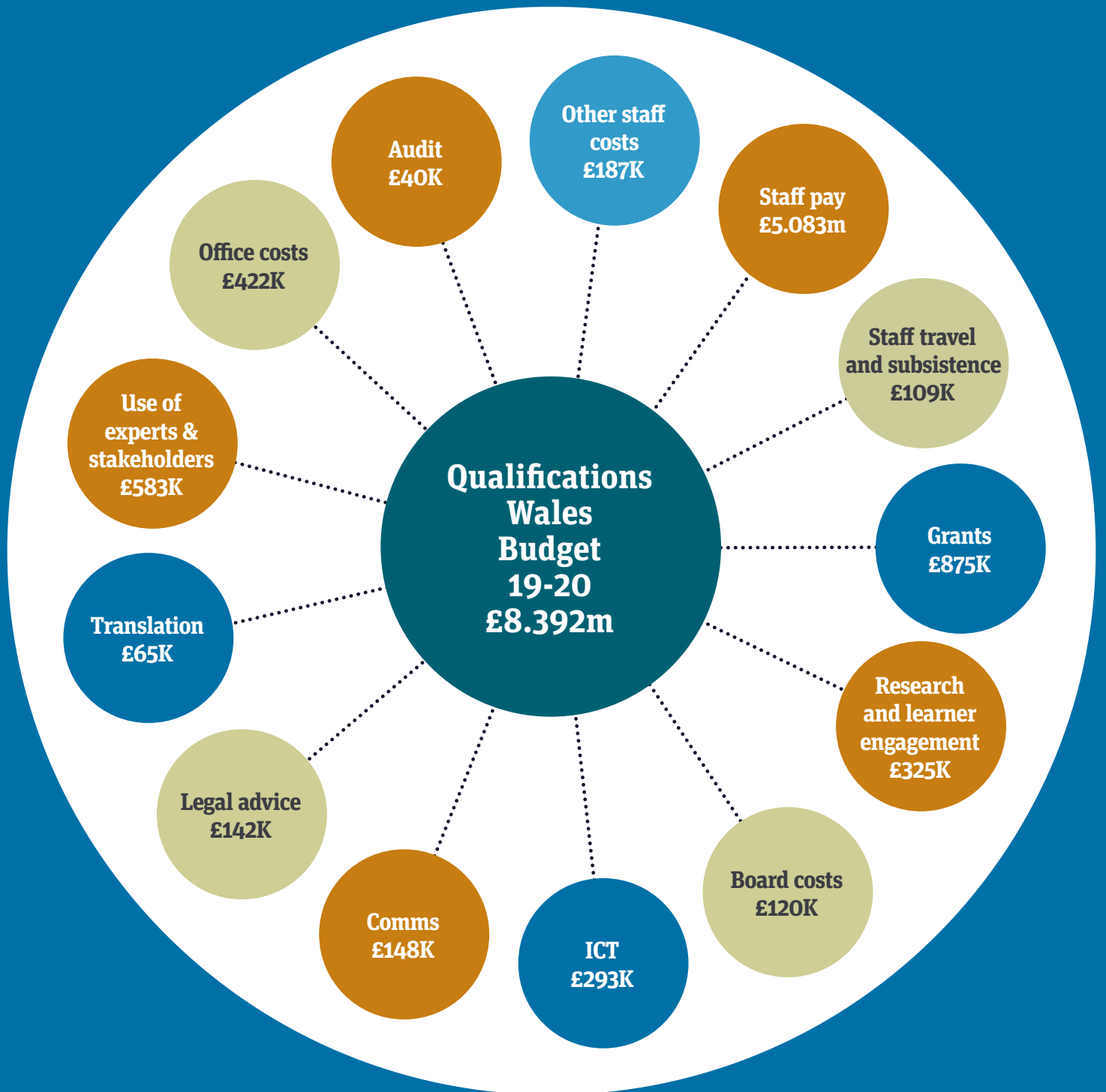
Part of our immediate response to the challenge of the coronavirus pandemic was to assess the impact we felt it would have on our 2020-21 operational plan and associated budgets. This resulted in an initial reduction in our budget requirement to £8.977m, which we immediately communicated to Welsh Government. We have arrangements in place to continue to closely monitor this evolving position throughout 2020-21 and revise our funding requirement accordingly.

In the period covered by this report, we had seven internal audits in:

Regulation-monitoring
Grant and contract management
Cyber security, business continuity
Financial controls
Project management
Equalities and well-being

All seven had a ‘substantial assurance’ rating.

The following graphic illustrates how we plan to use the current budget.



► DELIVERING VALUE FOR MONEY

We follow the principles of *Managing Welsh Public Money* to ensure that all our spending decisions deliver value for money. When we procure goods and services, we review our approach and specifications and consider whether we can make further efficiency savings or realise wider benefits. We also aim to make contracts available to Wales-based suppliers to support the economic well-being goal. We monitor our expenditure regularly. At the end of August, 59% of our suppliers were based in Wales.

In past years, we have made some positive steps towards reducing our environmental impact by installing waterless urinals, sensor taps and LED sensor lighting. In the last financial year (prior to lockdown), we dramatically reduced our energy consumption; this demonstrates the benefit of the energy efficient LED lights and sensors installed. We are continuing to drive efficiencies and are working towards implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS).

We have realised savings in several areas this year following a competitive procurement process:



Social media

reduced annual cost by £3,735 (15%), whilst keeping the same level of service



Accounts analysis services

saved £4,080 against public sector framework rates from running a 'mini tender'



Mobile phone Tariff

annual saving of £3,321 (49%), compared with previous pricing



Transcription services

savings of £1,153 to date, when compared with our previous rate



Translation services

savings of £9,182 (19%), compared with the previous contract price



► A LONG-TERM OUTLOOK

As qualifications affect long-term life chances, our work has to be future-focused. Given our role as the qualifications regulator for Wales, we need a long-term view of education, and work closely with others in the system.

Although not currently subject to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (FG Act), we consider that our role supports its purpose, and that its requirements are compatible with how we work. For that reason, we have voluntarily chosen to adopt the provisions of the Act to underpin how we deliver our functions.

We have set out four objectives:

Supporting employers – developing qualifications for future skills needs.

Qualifications content – commissioning qualifications incorporating sustainable development where appropriate.

Supporting our workforce – an environment and culture promoting long-term well-being.

Collaboration – working with partners to increase efficiency or effectiveness.

In autumn 2020, we will publish our first progress report against these objectives.

► GRANTS

We support the qualifications system through grant funding, including support for bilingual provision and the introduction of new qualifications. We award grants that enable awarding bodies to offer qualification specifications and assessments through the medium of Welsh. We also provide funding to other organisations to support training, resources and continuing professional development. Last year, we paid over £850K to a variety of stakeholders to support the qualifications system. In April 2020, we made changes to the approach for the competitive Welsh-medium support grant. These changes allowed us to prioritise funding to newly developed or recently updated qualifications that align with government policy and have been identified as an area where there are gaps within the bilingual provision.

So far this year, we have awarded the following grants:

- **£195K** to support WJEC's Welsh for Adults qualification provision
- **£70K** to support the translation of specifications and other materials of the new Construction and Built Environment qualifications which will be available for first teaching in September 2021
- Nearly **£9K** to support college and work-based learning networks in health and social care, and childcare
- Nearly **£15K** to carry out a study into Construction and the Built Environment course provision across Wales.

As in previous years we have allocated a budget of **£410K** to support the provision of GCSEs and A levels in the medium of Welsh. Given the awarding approach taken in 2020, we are still in discussions with WJEC on what it is appropriate for them to claim.

► WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Our work with core stakeholders is an important part of what we do. We recognise that our audiences are all different, and that people will sometimes fit into more than one group.

Our dedicated external engagement team build productive relationships with schools and colleges, supporting centres with compliance and the qualifications system. Key achievements this year are:

Exams officer conferences 2020

We hosted our first exam officer conferences in January to an audience of 250, joined by awarding body representatives and the Minister for Education.

Invigilation guidance for centres

We created a series of six films as a resource for centres to use when delivering invigilator training.

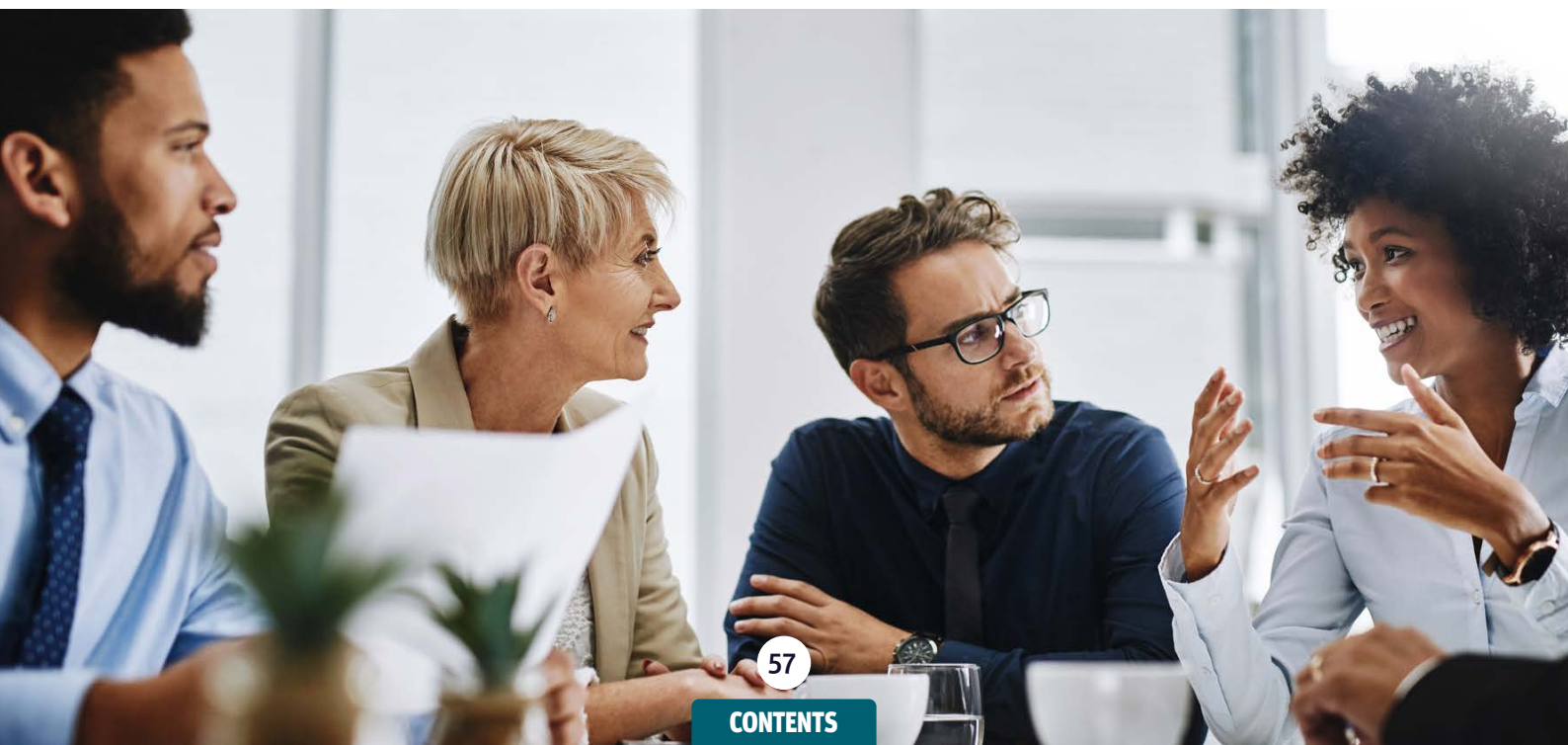
Awarding bodies' forum

We delivered our annual event for more than 80 awarding body representatives to share information on developments in qualification policy and reform in Wales.

Working with FE and HE

We have continued to proactively expand our FE and HE contact network significantly. We have a number of key contacts in place with all FE institutions and work closely with ColegauCymru and the National Training Federation Wales.

Similarly, we have established links across more than 100 universities and have strong working relationship with UCAS and Universities Wales. The face-to-face engagement work that we undertook before the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic has proven to be beneficial, as our virtual engagement through Zoom and Microsoft Teams with these institutions continues to be positive.



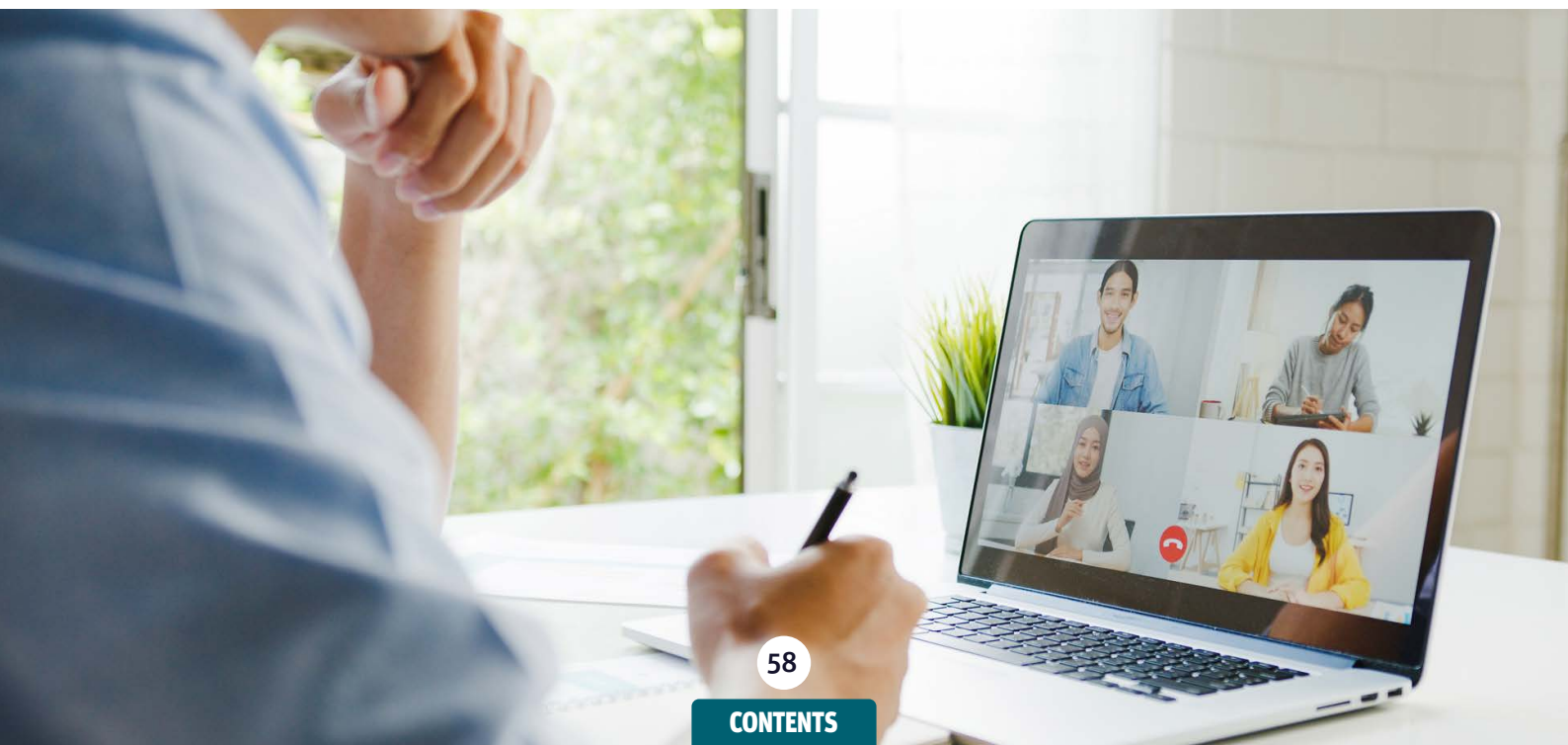
► BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

In the interest of informing and engaging, we host termly meetings (face to face and virtual) with teaching union representative organisations, our Headteacher Reference Group, the Association of Directors of Education in Wales and regional education consortia.

We continue to work closely with Welsh Government, Estyn and the Children’s Commissioner, the Welsh Language Commissioner, the Future Generations Commissioner and employer representative bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Institute of Directors.

We have increased our activity with the Members of the Senedd, and hosted a drop-in session in the Senedd in December 2019. Around results days, we had several meetings and provided virtual briefing opportunities for CYPE members and other Members of the Senedd.

This year, we have continued our engagement with minority groups and parent representative groups, learners and the Youth Parliament, to keep them informed of decisions and developments.



FORWARD LOOK

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, we know that the 2020-21 academic year will be like no other. We already know that the coronavirus pandemic will continue to impact our lives for many months to come, disrupting learning and requiring us to find innovative solutions to difficult problems. We will be working closely with our partners in the education sector in Wales to ensure that the awarding of qualifications is as fair as possible.

► KEY PRIORITIES

Ensuring fairness regarding summer 2021 exams

We will recommend specific courses of action to the Minister for Education to ensure fairness in the system, and we will implement her decisions.

Curriculum reform

We will shortly be launching a second *Qualified for the future* consultation to agree the range of subjects in which made-for-Wales GCSEs and other qualifications will be needed to support the new Curriculum for Wales. Once we know which qualifications will be required, we will consider the content that each qualification should cover and how it could be assessed. We will work closely with stakeholders to develop detailed design proposals for each qualification, which will be subject to a further round of consultation.

New qualifications for the construction and the built environment, and digital technology

The next 12 months will see schools and colleges prepare for the first teaching of new qualifications in the construction and built environment and digital technology sectors. These follow the reviews we have undertaken into how well the existing qualifications meet the needs of learners in these sectors. We consulted extensively and took on board the views of trainers and employers in those sectors.



Review of qualifications in the engineering, advanced manufacturing and energy sector

The publication of our latest review into the engineering, advanced manufacturing and energy sector – *'The Importance of Engineering'* – is due in the autumn.

New qualifications for travel, tourism and hospitality

We will start work on a review of qualifications in the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors. This is an important part of the Welsh economy, and it has been severely hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Our review understands the pressures faced by the sector during this unprecedented time – our work will ensure that the qualifications available meet the needs of this important sector.

New internal systems for Qualifications Wales

We will be implementing new human resources and finance software to support our work.



QUALIFICATIONS WALES' VALUES

collaborative

thoughtful

positive

learning



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